

THE COMMONPLACE PRODIGAL

THE TRAGEDY OF INEFFECTIVE PRAYER

THE COMMONPLACE PRODIGAL

THE TRAGEDY OF INEFFECTIVE PRAYER

BY

ALLAN KNIGHT CHALMERS

BROADWAY TABERNACLE CHURCH
NEW YORK CITY



NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

COPYRIGHT, 1934,
BY
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY, INC.

N.R.A.

PRINTED IN THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To my wife, whose spirit
can be seen in these pages
by those who know her.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
FOREWORD	ix
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xiii
IT IS NOT ENOUGH	3
THE BETTER COUNTRY	8
A GALLERY OF CARICATURES	23
YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY ALL	42
THE NEED OF A MODERN MONASTICISM	57
THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD	74
CREATIVE SYMBOLISM	101
THE LABORATORY NOTEBOOK	121
THE FEAR OF FREEDOM	130
I BELIEVE IN GOD	140
THE DISTANCE TO GOD	159
THE NEW EARTH	174
IT IS NOT ENOUGH	191
—	
PRAYERS IN THE TABERNACLE	209

FOREWORD

THIS is not an argument. Donn Byrne's Pope was right when he said, "Religion is not a matter of argument," as was Samuel Johnson when he said, "Sir, there is no argument for prayer." Neither is it an ordered treatment of the ways by which prayer may be justified. Arguments have been many and useless; and as for the ordered treatment, it has been so well done by others that to add a book of the same nature would be vanity.

Furthermore, this is not a series of calm, dispassionate essays on prayer, going into historical backgrounds and presenting a rounded philosophy about how and why men have prayed, or should, or can, pray.

It is frankly a plea—passionate, eager—for those who are wasting life, to find a method by which they can lay hold on, can feel contact with—God. Did you hesitate as you read the word, God? I wrote it that way. One cannot say carelessly, as if it were a simple idea, the word which gives a name to the Most High.

There has always been misunderstanding about my belief on prayer when it has been spoken.

FOREWORD

Partly, this is the inability of timid minds to attempt understanding. Often men's minds cannot climb over an apparent negative, and, falling back into a defensive attitude, they fail even to hear, much less to understand, the positive. They pick up the chips we knock off and find them rough. They do not look at the revealed figure upon which our hands are working.

The method of the spoken word, condensed, breathless in its intensity, could also take its share of the blame. The things of the spirit cannot be put on a billboard that he who runs may read; and because the spoken word is so often gone before you really could take it in, there is always great difficulty in presenting, by word of mouth, fundamental ideas which are unfamiliar.

In spite of these at least partially inevitable difficulties—men being as they are—there is the consciousness that one ought to be able to help people to see something one feels so strongly and sees so clearly. It is an humbling as well as a puzzling feeling to know that men of goodwill take as negative this which is strong and beautiful and moving, and will sometimes say, after hearing this emphasis, that the author does not believe in prayer at all.

Because the ideal way has been to have a small group which will follow through for several periods of discussion, and because the next best

FOREWORD

method has been the tightly organized series, I have a hope that in book form more will catch the positive side. To fail to do that is to miss both the intention and the experience of the author.

Inevitably there will be those, in that no man's land between adolescence and maturity, who will stick in the viscous mud of critical analyses. This is a state of being into which man comes as his early enthusiasms fade and the critical faculties develop, and from which many do not escape, since the sharp edge of their criticism is backed only by the meager capacity of a trench spade. Life to them is something to be catalogued and, having entered the matter before them on a card, they dispose of it by dropping it into a file.

May I remind those who explain everything with the aid of convenient pigeon holes, that classification in a philosophic scheme is proper for the scholar; yet, after you have assigned this presentation to what you believe is its proper pigeon hole, remember that there is portrayed here a way by which men and women, whose lives were wasted, have laid hold on a power by which to live.

Dated already by the illustrative material of "no man's land" and "trench spade," it will be well to give this further personal touch. It was out of the black experience of losing, in the front

FOREWORD

line during the World War, everything in which he had believed about God, that life had to be rebuilt from the bottom.

Steeped in history, which was to have been a lifework, the material was at hand to work with; but the whole plan of life had to be redrawn.

One realizes nothing new is here revealed, but, in what is said, there is the freshness of a personal discovery. This is the quality religion has always needed.

Because this practice of the Presence of God has given to me, first, and then to others as they have heard of it, this expectancy of the constantly more perfect, I send it out as a call to the Modern Prodigals who are wasting their substance in Commonplace Living.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My sincere appreciation is given to the publishers and individuals for permission to quote the following:

"On a Subway Express," by Chester Firkins—*The Atlantic Monthly*.

From *Messer Marco Polo*, by Donn Byrne—D. Appleton-Century Company.

From "The Prayers of God," by W. E. B. Du Bois, in *Darkwater*—Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc.

From *Color*, by Countee Cullen, "For an Unsuccessful Sinner," "Simon the Cyrenian Speaks," and a portion of "The Shroud of Color"—Harper and Brothers.

From *The Sorrows of God*, by Studdert-Kennedy, "Indifference," and portions of "Faith," and "Well"—Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd.

From "The Meeting," by John Greenleaf Whittier, in *Whittier's Complete Poetical Works*—Houghton Mifflin Company.

From *The Uncertain Trumpet*, by A. S. M. Hutchinson—Little, Brown & Company.

From *Poems of the Unknown Way*, by S. R. Lysaght, "The Penalty of Love"—The Macmillan Company.

From *Icaro*, by Lauro De Bosis, in the *Translation from the Italian* by Ruth Draper—Oxford University Press, New York.

"Prayer," by Arthur Christopher Benson, in *The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse*—Oxford University Press, London.

From *Lazarus Laughed*, by Eugene O'Neill (Copyrighted, 1927, by Horace Liveright, Inc. Now published by Random House, New York)—Random House.

From *Peer Gynt*, by Henrik Ibsen—Charles Scribner's Sons.

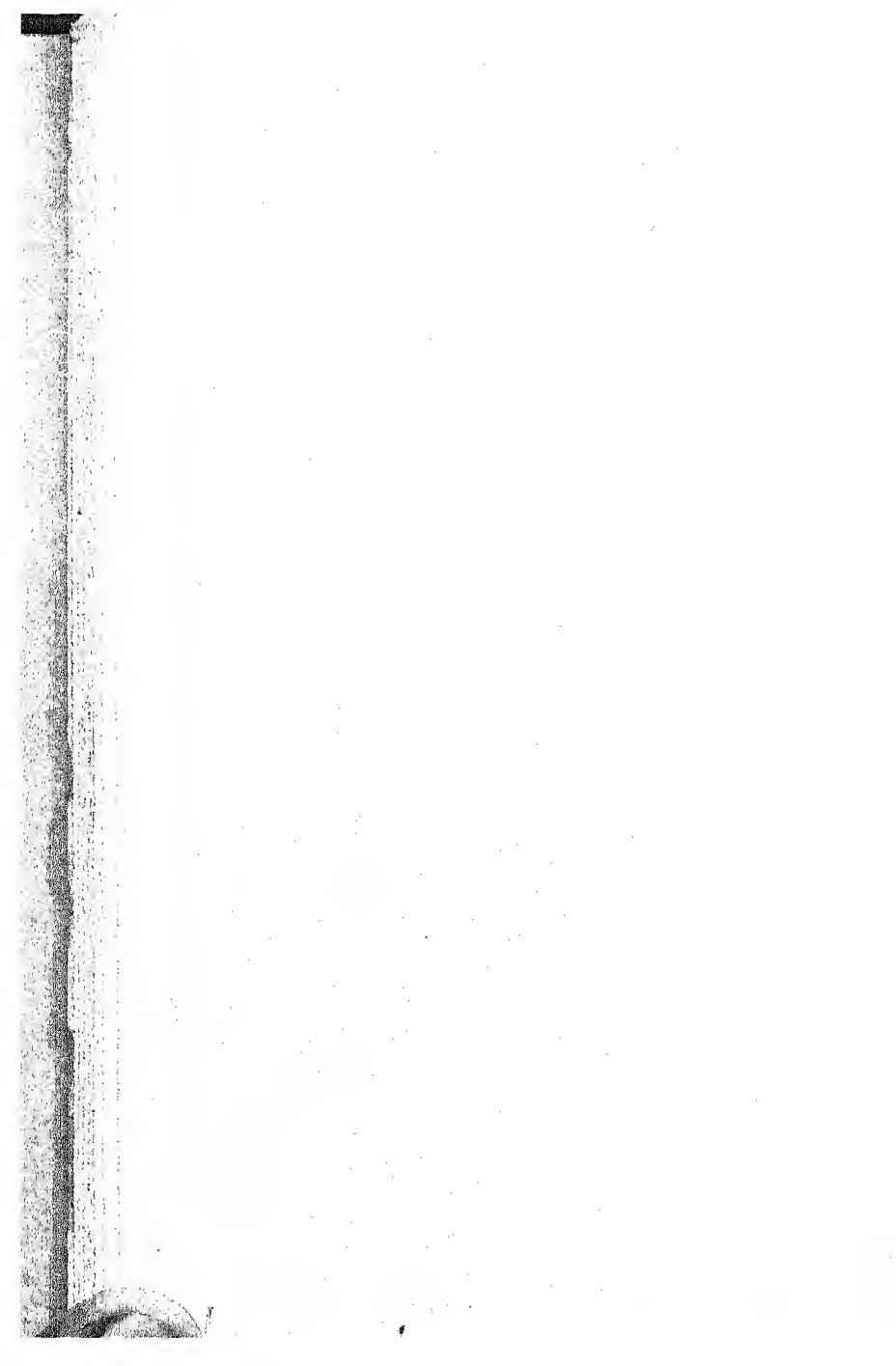
"My Father and I," by Charles Badger Clark, Jr., for his gracious permission to quote.

From *The Hidden Years*, by John Oxenham, for his gracious permission to quote the two passages.

I also desire to thank Mr. Paul Dane for his drawing which introduces the section, "Prayers in the Tabernacle," and to Miss Marion L. Norris, my secretary, for her valuable assistance with the manuscript; and to Liveright Publishing Corporation, and Caroline Miles Hill, Compiler of *The World's Great Religious Poetry*, for their assistance in allowing me to quote from "The Church," by Jules Romain.

A. K. C.

THE COMMONPLACE PRODIGAL
THE TRAGEDY OF INEFFECTIVE PRAYER



IT IS NOT ENOUGH

WE are wasting our substance in commonplace living. We are not giving to the world convincing evidence that the Way of Life, which we profess, is worth it; not convincing enough, at any rate, to draw all men unto it as a longing and a goal. Life is so seldom different for people who profess the Christian belief in God, and it ought to be.

The prayers of man have become either unexpectant or satisfied with petty inadequacies. Religion is so often content if it can keep abreast of its past. However satisfactory this may have been for the days gone by, it is not enough now.

We can no longer be interested, in this day, in a religious experience which leaves man merely holding his own. We are moving too rapidly, somewhere. We uneasily feel that that somewhere is to destruction. Life is getting increasingly complicated. We have a hazy notion, back there somewhere in our minds, that most civilizations have perished because they could not learn to control their problems and their powers, but we have a sort of pious hope that we shall be the exception.

IT IS NOT ENOUGH

We could not make an intelligent argument about it if we had to. The signs mainly point in the other direction. But with a certain amount of sentimentalism we fall back on the "God's in His heaven, all's right with the world" school of poetry, or the popular misunderstanding of the "chosen people" complex of the Old Testament.

We think in the superficial slogans of popular history. "God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform," we quote, and go on to say soothingly, "Things look none too well now, but do not worry; God will fix it up all right." Happily we brood over the world in which we live. "Why, there never was a crisis in the history of the world when God did not have a man ready to handle the situation."

"Isn't it wonderful what God does!"

"Maybe He'll use me some day when the country needs me. Wouldn't that be great? I'm all excited. Why, I would be like Cincinnatus called from his plow—such a romantic thing to be called from—or like Lincoln, or even Mussolini."

"Oh, how happy I would be to give my life for a great cause!"

Day dreamers! Romantic sentimentalists, that we are. God has called men throughout the history of the world to be ready, and men have failed Him. Time and again in history the

IT IS NOT ENOUGH

lonely God has needed a man, sometimes just one man, and the man has been lacking.

"No, no," you say, "that is blasphemy. Look at the Revolutionary War and Washington. Look at the Civil War and Lincoln. Look at the early church and Paul, the medieval church and Luther. You see, there never is a crisis where God does not have a man ready to handle it."

What vacuous complacency! Read history again! Where was the man, or group of men, or institution which handled the crisis of ancient Babylon, bent on destruction? Who was there to save the Holy City, Jerusalem, as the chosen people of God went out into Captivity? Where the group of men who kept Sodom and Gomorrah from destruction? God called. Where the force of men or institutions which sensed the coming of the French Revolution as the nobility in their silly placid peace rode on to destruction? Where in Russia the knowledge of the things which belonged unto her peace? Where, in our generation, that which could make the minds of men to see what desolation would be upon the earth? No man of God, big enough! No church of God, God-filled enough to know in this, our day, the things which belong unto our peace.

IT IS NOT ENOUGH

Yes, God calls. He is calling us now, calling to us to face the world with keen minds and honest eyes. Calling to us, "It is not enough to say unto me, 'Lord, Lord.' You must do my will. It is not enough to say your prayers, to be seen of men. You must show love one to the other. It is not enough to try. You must succeed in building the City of God you pray about."

This demand is implicit in Christianity but we have lost somewhere the dynamic. We have become so accustomed to church and the forms of church that we have no expectancy. Sleeping too late, or lost in the folds of the Sunday paper, we do sometimes arrive at church physically breathless; but we are not spiritually breathless. We have no almost aching awe as we enter the church; no eagerness at the possible miracle of meeting God that day.

The terrible immediacy of the Way of Christ has become an historical exhibit rather than a present fact. We are so accustomed to seeking for God without expecting to find Him that to feel the haunting sense of His presence makes us feel that religion has become importunate if not even a little impertinent. We have lost the knowledge that it is "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

IT IS NOT ENOUGH

"There was an awful rainbow once in heaven;
We know her woof; her texture, now; she
is given

In the dull catalogue of common things,"

the poet sings as he sorrows over a lost ecstasy.

"The dull catalogue of common things."
What an indictment! We have become of all men most miserable—the professional knowers of God. We have taken the gift of God—this human life we hold, one life with the possibility in it of the divine—and we have kept it safe, rejoicing that it is unpolluted as men judge by their easy standards of morality. We are dust of the dust and have kept our dirt clean. We have forgotten the spark of the divine which makes of the elements of earth a different creature known as man.

We have sinned and do not know that we have sinned. We have given reasonableness to the scientist when he says that there is nothing in man but this piece of flesh, since we have not made life sufficiently upsetting to his simple theories by adding to it facts he has to recognize, even though he cannot explain them.

We have wasted our substance in commonplace living.

THE BETTER COUNTRY

SOMETHING happened. We ought not to think that strange but it is for us; it was for them. Often the disciples had noted it. When Jesus prayed, something happened. He was praying one day and "as He prayed the fashion of His countenance was altered." There is a note of pathos in His disciples' subsequent request. "Lord, teach us to pray." It revealed their past inadequacies. They were dissatisfied with their own experience when they saw in contrast what it did for Him. I wish we were—dissatisfied.

It bothers thoughtful people a great deal—this business of prayer. Men take it so much as a matter of course. They think so loosely about it. Taught perhaps as universally as anything, so much ingrained into our *mores* that people instinctively hush at the sight of a kneeling figure, and even hardened men are proverbially supposed to halt at the sight of a praying child, and yet this universal acceptance of the act as a holy thing means so little—so tragically little—in the effect upon life.

There is a particular group of people to whom this message on prayer will be directed. There

THE BETTER COUNTRY

are many others, of course, who have difficulty with this central interest of religion. One of the most important of these groups is made up of those whose major difficulty with prayer is philosophical. They cannot believe in God and, naturally, prayer has no meaning for them.

If Browning's Bishop should ask them the question about God that he asked about Christ, "It may be false, but will you wish it true?" they would answer, "Oh, that I could believe it true! Prove it to me!" But it is something that you cannot be argued into, and we are not attempting to do it.

Remember how the Pope in Donn Byrne's *Messer Marco Polo* warns him about the Great Khan:

"Now in the matter of converting the Great Khan and his numerous millions to Christianity, I have little hopes. He wants to be argued into it, you see. Religion is not a matter of argument. It is a wisdom that surpasses wisdom. It drifts in men's souls as the foggy dew comes unbidden to the trees.

"And now, my child, you might say, 'What is the use, then, of sending me to China if you know I cannot bring these millions into the fold?' My dear son, things of the spirit we cannot reckon as a husbandman reckons his crops."

THE BETTER COUNTRY

Then he goes on to tell him why he sends him.

"A great and noble thought must not die. The beauty God has put in your heart, child, you must always keep. . . . How much I think of it I'll tell you. I'm an old man now, an old and broken man, and in a few years I'll stand before my Master.

"'What have you seen on earth,' He'll ask me, 'you who followed St. Peter! . . .'

"'I've seen a young man go out into the desert and over his head was a star . . .'

"You may think you have failed, child, but remember that in the coming times your name and fame will awaken beauty, and many's the traveler on the hard road will find his courage again, and he thinking of Marco Polo. And many's the young man will dream dreams, and many's the old man will see visions, because of you. And for this you must keep your dream.

"Now you'll think it's the queer pope I am to be telling you things like this instead of demanding converts. But you see there is a wisdom surpassing wisdom, and it is out of this fount of wisdom I am drawing when I speak to you these words.

"Child, I will not keep you any longer. Only to say this, and this is the chiefest thing: never let your dream be taken from you. Keep it

THE BETTER COUNTRY

unspotted from the world. In darkness and in tribulation it will go with you as a friend; but in wealth and power hold fast to it, for then is danger. Let not the mists of the world, the gay diversions, the little trifles, draw you from glory.

"Remember!"

Like Marco Polo, therefore, you can talk about religion, but you have to see it for yourself in the end.

In a young business men's group one night we were talking of Immortality, or, as we preferred to think of it, the Continuation of Personality. One of the finest of them all, a handsome young giant, as clean and straight a man as you would want, who had tried to argue at first, only we would not argue—you cannot argue a man into these things—leaned forward while another man was telling what he did believe and why. Interrupting, the big man spoke. "Pete," he said, "I'd give anything in the world if I believed what you believe. I don't, but keep on talking. I may catch on to something you have seen that I haven't."

To those who are unable to believe in God, this emphasis can help only if they read in this spirit. There is no lack of sympathy with such a feeling in anything we say. Many who agree with the belief central to this emphasis—that

THE BETTER COUNTRY

God is personal, at least as personal as ourselves—have come to this dwelling place of the spirit by a pilgrimage which makes us know what a tough world it is (the adjective is literal) when life becomes strangled in doubt. When a man sees no meaning to it; when blind chance rules it; when all that we mean by God in our most intelligent and inspired moments is as flat of feeling as a telephone girl's "Excuse it, please," it makes a dark brown taste in the soul.

Having lost God in the trenches in the World War; having looked at the world with jaundiced eyes, atheistic and pessimistic; having had to wait through years for prayer to become a reality—for how can one pray to a God in Whom one does not really believe?—I know something of your difficulties. But I also know that you cannot be argued out of that mood.

This emphasis on prayer is concerned, therefore, not with those who do not believe in very much, but with those who have some workable philosophy about God which is not too greatly choked with doubt about Him. It is addressed to those who have accepted a belief in God as a foundation to work on. They cannot prove, they only believe, that there is a Being in the Universe at least as personal as themselves with Whom they can, or ought to be able to, have contact. This book is for those who would

THE BETTER COUNTRY

echo Studdert-Kennedy when he thus replies to a man who wants him to prove the goodness of God:

"How do I know that God is good?
I don't. I bet my life upon one side
Of life's great war. I must.
I can't stand out. I must take sides.
How is it proved? It isn't proved, you fool.
It can't be proved.
How do you prove a victory before it's won?
How do you prove a man who leads
To be a leader worth the following
Unless you follow to the death? And out
beyond
Mere death which is not anything
But Satan's lie upon Eternal Life.
Well, God's my Leader."

We know what many will say here. "Oh, that's a wish fulfillment." All right, let's suppose it is. But for the moment let's take our stand with those who see that, or think they do. You who don't, listen in. We are not arguing with you. We are trying to make what we believe real.

These special groups, therefore, concern us: those who, believing in a God, are satisfied with their experience of prayer and do not change, as they ought to change, because the thrilling

THE BETTER COUNTRY

expectancy has become a commonplace; and those who, dissatisfied, cannot seem to find a way out to that change in life which makes prayer have meaning.

Some people say that with the first group you can do nothing. Smothered in their own complacency they cannot if they would, they would not if they could, make any effort to change. Prayer has become a fixed habit of action, as unchangeable as a man's dress suit whereon one puts braid on the trousers or leaves it off again as the seasons come and go, but which in general is so set that the chances are good that the suit a man is married in will look all right for the golden wedding, if he will only change the vest. It is not true that this group of believers in conventional prayer is hopeless. They can, they do, change. If only the younger generation would have the hope in the older that they demand for themselves, we would get on.

You must not think that you must change to some other form just to change; far less, to try my way of prayer. But this is true, if prayer means anything at all: we must be able to see, as we go on year after year, a measurable growth in Christian experience. Sins conquered, higher good captured, constantly less of self and more of God as a part of the daily life. This much for

THE BETTER COUNTRY

those whose own goodnesses of the past are being used as a barrier in the path to God.

For the other group—those desperate in their sense of prayer's futility, although they believe we ought to find the dynamic—we must be careful only that we make vivid enough the new possibilities of contact with God, for they are ready for a way, for any way, that will satisfy their hunger that life shall have meaning.

It is this which should trouble us, that we do not grow in prayer. Our childlike prayers become childish. Back from childhood memories comes the story supposed to illustrate that there was good in every man, no matter how wicked he seemed. I can remember the man's name, curiously. A notorious crook, swindler, forger, he was, who never went to bed at night without reading a chapter from the Bible and then kneeling by his bedside, repeating the prayer he learned at his mother's knee, "Now I lay me down to sleep." You do not blame people for becoming cynical about religion when that was, and still is, a typical story.

You would have seen this unreasonable idea of prayer in a Theatre Guild play called *Roar China*. There were the innocent Chinese coolies about to be hung to save the white man's dignity. There was the missionary—a caricature, of course—or was he a caricature? The awful thought

THE BETTER COUNTRY

comes upon us, "Perhaps he was real, that cartoon of a man.—Perhaps he was." The white woman told him to pray for the poor Chinese; and he was going to. Suddenly it was as if the whole audience was a body. You felt—it was the only time you did feel reality in the play—you felt the sudden change from a number of people observing the play in a detached way to a single personality with feelings and a voice.

"Boloney!" said the girl next to me in a queer, desperate, hurt sort of cry, and she slumped down in her seat as if ashamed.

A jeering, almost terrified, gasp went over the audience as if it were trapped like a wild animal. One felt with a maddening horror that a mask had slipped from religion as we have made it, and it was beastly.

Does that seem too strong? All right, listen! You have been saying prayers for—how many years? What is different in the environment which makes your life because you have said prayers—these many years?

Start with yourself. Thomas à Kempis, in his *Imitation of Christ*, says: "If every year we would root out one vice, we would soon become perfect men. But now oftentimes we perceive it goeth contrary, and that we were better and purer at the beginning of our entrance into the religious life than after many years of our pro-

THE BETTER COUNTRY

fession. Our fervor and profiting should increase daily; but now it is accounted a great matter if a man can retain but some part of his first zeal."

How about it? Count the men and women older than yourself whom you know, who have, as the old hymn puts it, laid "hold on life" that "it shall be" their "joy and crown eternally"; who give you a sense of something thrusting through life which makes for power. When you meet such an one does not life become more radiant because of it? How tragically rare it is, so that it is a cause for remark when you find it, rather than being as natural as growing old.

"The young people the hope of the next generation?" Don't fool yourself. These are—these on the trail of life ahead of us—who are the hope of the next generation. "What's the use of growing older if one only learns new ways of being mischievous?" asks Saki in satirical comment on his irrepressible character, Clovis. What's the use of anything, the younger generation will reply, if life is just a treadmill with man a donkey stretching his ever hopeful neck to an always impossible tuft of hay fastened just before his nose? That's why you have stopped praying, some of you.

No, do not be ashamed. There are lots of you. You say to me in a shamed sort of way,

THE BETTER COUNTRY

"Well, to be honest, I don't pray very often." Why should you—when nothing happens? When you do not make contact, when nothing in life changes, why go on saying prayers?

"Bring no more vain oblations," cries Isaiah, "when you make many prayers I will not hear. Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well."

One day I stood before a group of Christian people. In my hands I held a Buddhist prayer wheel. It was a little can, highly ornamented, with a spindle stuck through the bottom and the top, and with a ball and chain hung from the edge to turn it when it was whirled. Inside, wound around the spindle's shaft, was a scroll of prayers written down on parchment, hundreds of them. Each time the can revolved around the spindle all the prayers were said once. I swung it. It made a queer, squeaking sound. "There! We've said our prayers!" I said, and laid it down. It would have been true if we had been Buddhists. Is it any less true because we walk the treadmill of accustomed words, we Christians?

We are, let us imagine, in a Communion Service. God is love. We are not arguing about what He is. Accept Him for the moment. To live as the sons of God, our goal. We pray:

THE BETTER COUNTRY

"Almighty God, before Whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from Whom no secrets are hid, cleanse Thou the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit that we may more perfectly love Thee and more worthily magnify Thy Holy Name, through Jesus Christ, our Lord."

We have said that prayer in our service of communion more times than we can count. How much cleaner?

"Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth . . ."

"On earth?" Where?

Have you ever heard the jeer run over a crowd of unemployed as they drown out the reading of the Sermon on the Mount?

"On earth?" "Thy will be done on earth?" Where?

We Christians laugh at prayer wheels. We Protestants smile pityingly at Catholic beads. Laugh at yourself. We are the joke. Prayer is the medium of communication. It is the contact with God. What transforming power has been communicated through you these many years?

In his *Lazarus Laughed*, Eugene O'Neill has that calm figure gazing down pityingly at the

THE BETTER COUNTRY

crowd, suddenly stopped in their dance, suddenly stilled in their laughter.

Softly he speaks:

"You laugh, but your laughter is guilty! It laughs a hyena laughter, spotted, howling its hungry fear of life! That day I returned did I not tell you your fear was no more, that there is no death? You believed then—for a moment! You laughed—discordantly, hoarsely, but with a groping toward joy. What! Have you so soon forgotten, that now your laughter curses life again as of old?"

He pauses, then says sadly:

"That is your tragedy! You forget! You forget the God in you! You wish to forget! Remembrance would imply the high duty to live as a son of God—generously!—with love!—with pride!—with laughter! This is too glorious a victory for you, too terrible a loneliness! Easier to forget, to live by denying life!"

And then afterwards—with a great yearning: "If men would remember. If they only could!"

If only men had a tense choking sensation as they think of prayer! It makes me tremble to think you may not catch it. You see, I know something—that you can be different. That life is not a stagnant thing, or at least that it does not need to be. In the next chapter we shall consider the common habits of prayer, those

THE BETTER COUNTRY

experiences, so unsatisfactory, where man is let down, or lets the world down. Destructive, some will say, and it is, of course, but with a purpose. If there were nothing to build there, a man would be a blind fool to say what I shall say. But there is a dwelling place for the spirit of man where all the words he uses take substance. Life, and Light, and Love; Peace and Power; Brotherhood. They become part of the structure of a building man can live in. It is not a place of confessional where he bewails in selfish remorse his weakness and his sin. It is not an altar where he lays sacrifices of repentance and promises to do better, if he can. It is not a time or a temple where he makes (note the word) his prayers to God. It is a Presence in which he dwells. In that Presence he becomes strong. Fears fade; convictions grow. His eyes, dulled by prejudice and dimmed by ignorance, see in the clear light of the Presence that color, and race, and religion have been made the artificial barriers of his fear. He sees that a Negro is a man like himself; that a Jew is both Shylock and Jesus in potentiality, even as he. He sees that a Catholic is a fellow Christian.—And he does not fear any of them. In the silence of that constant Presence his deafened ears become rested and he hears voices which call him on to new discoveries of God.

THE BETTER COUNTRY

Jesus changed men. They were not the same when He had passed. More set in their ways, some of them. Throwing themselves more feverishly into the rush of life to get away from the disturbing thoughts He stuck into their minds, some of them. But different, all of them. People like us, different.

They killed Him. To still His voice; to close His searching eyes; to forget what He told them about themselves as sons of God, which they could become, if they really wanted to—they killed Him.

This is no new doctrine. It only says this: Wherever you are, come unto yourself. Know yourselves to be the sons and daughters of God. Arise, let us go unto the Father.

If our way of contact with God in prayer is ineffective to make us grow in that achievement, let's find a way of contact. Not my way. It works for me, but may not for you. Which way is not important. Let's find a way that does change men and society.

Not all of you may be willing to search. You do not know where a vision of God may take you. But something did happen then. Something can happen now—to men, and to the cities of men.

A GALLERY OF CARICATURES

THE emphasis of this chapter is frankly destructive. We must make clear a point of cleavage. So much of our religious thinking is loosely inclusive. We let people think that what they are doing is probably all right when it is that dangerous kind of truth that is sufficiently right to keep them from the greater truth from which it hides them. Truth is narrow, and the shadings from truth which we allow ourselves are responsible for much of the stagnation of religion-in-action.

What I am about to do, therefore, is to draw for you a picture of the country from which we are called to go out. In swift strokes the landmarks of common experience will be sketched; caricatures, if you will, for we must see the land of our bondage with sufficient vividness so that we shall not want to return to it. There is no sense now of the queer choking sensation which always comes when I go into the positive side of this. There, one feels all of a tremble. There, great things are immanent which might be if only one can get people to see that there is a better country, and the glimpse of it makes

A GALLERY OF CARICATURES

one gasp. There, one might be able at last to really-believe. (That is not a split infinitive. It is a hyphenated verb. To believe is a common garden variety of verb. To really-believe is that rare flower of beauty we see once in a while in the garden of the world's radiant souls.) Perhaps you and I can learn, there, to really-believe the vision of life told and lived by Him. Remember that now, as I take you into the picture gallery of our past inadequacies. This must be personal in illustration for I speak to you not from books. This is the land through which a troubled spirit wandered before it found power by which to live.

In our experience of prayer from childhood to today we find these ideas. There is first of all *Life Insurance Prayer*. Some might call it *Fire Insurance Prayer* if their eyes were on another world and they happened to believe a certain brand of theology—a sort of sprinkler system in preparation for a possible fire at some future time. Prayer is the premium, and woe betide the luckless one who lets his policy lapse. God will take that opportunity of “getting you” while you are unprotected.

There is a queer magical element in it: the feeling of “a thousand shall fall at my side and ten thousand at my right hand, but it shall not come nigh me—I’ve paid my premium!” This

A GALLERY OF CARICATURES

is not, however, what the ninety-first Psalm says.

One of the great religious leaders of the country whose name I do not mention for I would not hurt his influence, speaking to a young men's group on the value of prayer, told this story from his own experience. Said he, "I travel thousands of miles each year speaking in the colleges. I never put out the light in my Pullman berth without first making a prayer for the engineer, the crew, and the safety of the passengers in their care. "And," he went on, with a triumphant Q. E. D. in his voice, "I never have been in an accident."

That hurts so that one can hardly speak about it. Is prayer a charm, or is his own righteousness an amulet carrying safely on the un-praying, un-righteous companions of his journey just because he is there? If his belief is right and it does effect God in influencing Him to guarantee that comparatively insignificant incident, that his body may be preserved from accident, should he not pray every night for every engineer and every crew that they be preserved from harm? You would think he was an Indian Medicine Man talking to savages trembling before the elements of nature.

I went through all that. My prayers were

A GALLERY OF CARICATURES

keeping me in God's good graces. One night we had a pillow fight and in the midst of the conflict came the parental command, "Get right to bed." I was under the covers and almost asleep when the awful thought came over me, "I haven't said my prayers." Hopping out of bed with the winter wind playing hide-and-seek with my bare toes, I rattled through the accustomed form of words and popped back in. I trembled for a moment at what might have happened if I had not said them. "God might have taken that opportunity," I thought, "when I was unprotected, of 'getting me.'" You would think that He was a gangster God and we were paying protection for His favor.

So many times you hear people say, as some sudden catastrophe has come, "Why does God do this to me? I've always gone to church and said my prayers. Why does He let this happen to me?" A logical attitude it is since one has done his part in the bargain and feels that God ought to look out for his policy holders.

There is, second, *Emergency Service Prayer*.

"Mother, mother, I feel sick, send for the doctor, quick, quick, quick," chant the children. "Help! Murder! Police!" the frantic call of a frightened woman from the second-story window into the still night air of the village asleep.

A GALLERY OF CARICATURES

These are not prayers! No! Caricatures of prayer!

We so often make prayer a towing-in service for stranded Christians when out of gas or broken down on the road. "Better join the church now; you never know when you might need our service."

You needn't say, "That isn't fair. I do not pray that way." Some people do. You need not put on any cloak that does not fit you.

Prayer now becomes the last desperate hope in a lost cause. "I hadn't prayed for years," the engineer was speaking after the accident, "but I prayed then." Again the talisman theme breaks in. Peer Gynt, shipwrecked, leans over and grasps by the hair the drowning man he has pushed from the flimsy support he wants for himself, holding him from going under for a moment and saying, before he lets him drown, "Say your Lord's Prayer quick," as if that would let him through the gates of heaven.

Contrast two scenes:

Peer Gynt, secure in his wealth and power, boasts to his friends upon his yacht that he "takes religion intermittently." "It goes more smoothly down that way." When the next scene opens, however, we find the yacht is disappearing over the horizon leaving Peer a castaway on the beach. The distraught man, tearing

A GALLERY OF CARICATURES

his hair, pinching his upper arms as if to give himself protection from his fears, raves at first, then turns suddenly to abject prayer.

"Do but hear me, O Lord!

Since Thou art so wise, so righteous.

It is I, Peer Gynt, O our Lord, give but heed!

Hold Thy hand o'er me, Father, or else I must perish!

Make them back the machine! Make them lower the jib!

Make something go wrong with the rigging!

Hear me! Let other folks' business lie over!

The world can take care of itself for the time!—

[*amazed and indignant*]

I'm blessed if He hears me! He's deaf as His wont is!

Here's a nice thing! A God that is bankrupt of help! [*slyly, ingratiatingly*]

Hist; I've abandoned the Nigger plantation!

Surely one good turn should be worth another!

Oh, help me on board."

How contrasting the attitude of Jim Heritage in *The Uncertain Trumpet*. He has gone over the side of the yacht in the night after his friend Bill who cannot swim. The yacht cannot find them as they hang to the buoy. They watch its lights going away at last. They are growing weary and cannot hang on long.

A GALLERY OF CARICATURES

"Bill, I guess we're booked through all right this time. No return tickets," says Jim.

[Silence.]

"Oh, Jim, pretty rotten, would you say, to start praying now when we're up against it?"

"Yes, pretty rotten, Bill. Best go through as we have run."

One by one they slip off at last with a little cry into the darkness. How infinitely better to be honest with God and let your life speak rather than your trembling lips.

This does not mean we do not speak with God by the words of our lips (of that more later), but we must watch the motives and the manner by which our lips move. I learned my lesson on that early. We had landed, the whole family, in London, and Father was taken sick. I was sent out alone, a boy of fifteen, into the streets of London to find a doctor. They were all over at a Medical Congress. As my hurrying feet went from doctor's sign to doctor's sign, I prayed desperately, the same short prayer, "Oh, save him, Lord, save him, Lord," over and over again. The cadence of my feet on the pavement beat it out with rising desperation. The doctor was found at last.

Back in my room after the doctor was delivered, I searched hastily for a Bible. I wanted to be as much in God's good graces as I could for

A GALLERY OF CARICATURES

I remembered something about the prayers of a righteous man availing much. Taking the Bible, it fell open, quite naturally I suppose, at the Sermon on the Mount, and my horrified eyes fell upon this sentence: "But when ye pray use not vain repetitions as the heathen do for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking."

A wave of horror went over me. Youth is a terrifying time, if life hits hard. It makes me ache to know that so many young people find themselves in places like that. "Oh," I thought, "I've been praying as the heathen do and God will refuse to help Father because I did."

But believing then in the efficacy of that magical kind of prayer, I knelt by my bed and said this prayer: "Please, God, forget all the times I've said it before, and remember it just this once, and I'll not do it again."

There is *Prayer to God, the Errand Boy, to God, the Santa Claus*, to the genii in Aladdin's Lamp. As a short cut to the understanding of this, listen to Jules Romain as he senses the prayers going up in church:

"O God in Heaven, vouchsafe to cure my leg!
Matter burst from it yesterday. My God,
Vouchsafe to fill my shop with customers!
—Help me find out if my servant John
Is robbing me!—O God, cure my sore eyes!

A GALLERY OF CARICATURES

—Save me, my God, from being drunk so often!

—Lord, let my son pass his examination!

He is so shy. Thou shalt have a great big candle.

—Help me to make her fall in love with me,

I will put ninepence in St. Anthony's box.

—My God, if only I could get some work!

—He makes a martyr of me. Let me die!"

• • • • •
"It is like a hamlet at the hour of noon.

On every soul's hearth they have kindled fire,

Which casts its smoke and yields it to the wind.

God sees the bluish prayers climb up to Him."

Analyze your prayers, these complacent prayers for missions, and peace, and brotherhood, and goodness; these prayers about people and things. Think about "Prayer Lists" as a method.

In England, one day, they tell us, there was the attempt to find out whether prayer really did work. They staged what they called a prayer test. There were two hospitals in towns of about equal size. They asked all the good Christian people to pray for the patients in one hospital and not to pray for the patients in the other; and this to find out whether prayer effected anything. How horrible! I believe that a few less died in the first hospital than in the

A GALLERY OF CARICATURES

second so that they considered that God had passed the examination. But what an immoral conception! It makes me shiver to think that any one should seriously do a thing like that.

I was speaking one day in a college group on this theme and the president of the college "Y" became all excited. "But look here," he said, "I've been praying every night for a whole lot of fellows. . . . It's what all the big bugs in religion do. . . . They have long prayer lists and I'm building mine up too. . . . There is Bill Jones, he's number fourteen on the list. He is 'going bad' rapidly. . . . You mean I shouldn't pray for him?"

"How long have you been doing it?" I asked.

"Oh, for months."

"Perhaps God knows about Bill Jones 'going bad' by this time," I suggested, "even if His memory may be poor because He is a little rushed with details. Perhaps He did need reminding, because He has so much on His mind, as did the God of *The Green Pastures*. But don't you suppose He knows it now? You must have told God about it one hundred times so far."

"But I've got to do something," he broke out. "I suppose you think I ought to give up more time to getting next to Bill. . . . But I can't. . . . I'm rushed to death too much as it is. . . . Saturday afternoon is my only free time now,

A GALLERY OF CARICATURES

and I need that for myself. . . . Do you mean I have to give up some Saturday afternoons to him?"

I said nothing through all these broken sentences. He wasn't asking me questions. He was talking to himself.

"Of course, you're right," he said at last, although I still had said nothing, ". . . but it sure makes it harder."

Yes, it does. It is much easier to cast your burden on the Lord; much easier to say prayers than to build the better country in a strange land.

Spiritual Gymnastics is the fourth caricature. It is the modern addition to the picture gallery of man's inadequacies.

In the new knowledge of this orderly universe of ours with our belief in a trustworthy instead of a capricious God, with some of these old attitudes now seen in cartoonish detail by new knowledge of the divine, we have fallen into a natural but dangerous idea that man does it all himself. Remember that I am going to speak about that when we come to the constructive side. Now, however, men find themselves, quite wrongly, I believe, oriented (as they use the word in colleges today to describe the round-the-world-with-Nellie-Blye survey course which H. G. Wells alone would feel capable of teaching and only a Francis Bacon could adequately

A GALLERY OF CARICATURES

consume) in psychology and philosophy, using prayer, if they use it at all, as a spiritual daily dozen for the psychological effect, a sort of calisthenics for the soul. Prayer is talking over with one's self the job for the day with general references to the principles of life, so that one will have the outline of the problems ahead and not forget the principles.

That this cul-de-sac is not a solution of man's modern dilemma is shown by the prayer of the hopeful skeptic when something went wrong in his practical world and he uttered this intellectually hygienic prayer, "O great hypothesis, there is something wrong with one of your premises."

We must face the slur the moderns throw at prayer by calling it auto-suggestion. It is, of course; why should we shrink from it? But with an enormous difference which I shall, at the proper time, develop with you.

Four miniatures; we must hurry from the picture gallery before the doors close: *Prayer as a Gambler's Chance*. It is the reason some people always pick up a pin. "Not that I'm superstitious," they say with a simpering smile, "only there is no use taking any chances. . . . Prayer may not do any particular good, but it certainly can't do any harm." We little realize what harm it does when thought of in these ways.

A GALLERY OF CARICATURES

Prayer as a Light Switch. Here is the power of God waiting for me to push a button. "God is waiting and ready, but you must ask Him. He won't, He can't, do anything until you ask Him." Presto—Light! What an immoral idea!

Here is some one sick. If God can, in this universe of law, heal that person, and He won't until I come to the sick room and get on my knees and bow my head and close my eyes and say words of petition, asking Him to do what He can do, and has been ready all the time to do, then He is an immoral being and the world is too silly for a sane man to live in. When we come to the positive end of such situations as we find constantly in the sick room, I shall tell you about the miracle of the healing of the dying twins.

Prayer as a Pious Habit. Is there anything which compartmentalizes religion and life quite as sharply as the words, "Let us pray"? Suddenly noise, motion, thought, feeling, stop. Life is suspended animation. No one moves, no one looks, no one speaks. An incident reveals this caricature.

It was a Christian Association Conference of men and women. Matters of policy had caused bitterness. With biting sarcasm, with denunciation and sulks, the fight went on. Lunch time found the battle raging hotly, and they postponed the closing time for half an hour; but the

A GALLERY OF CARICATURES

closing time only found them one half hour further apart. It looked for a while as if hair would be pulled. "Oh, well . . ." "Let's quit. . . ." "No one . . . o-o-h, if he only would show some sense. . . ." "Is that so? . . ." Glaring, the meeting started to break up.

Just then the chairman remembered that she had asked me to lead the closing devotions. "Wait a moment," she called out over the field of battle, "I've asked one of the alumni to lead us in prayer."

Well, you should have seen them. Back into their chairs they dropped. Down their heads went. Smug their expressions. You could have cut huge pious hunks out of the atmosphere.

Fortunately, knowing the pious habits of men, being one myself, I was ready and said, "There is nothing which would be more meaningless than for me to say pious words at this time. Here you have been trying for hours to put something over on man and you ask me now in two minutes to make it all right with God. We need the presence of God but we have been needing (in the sense of lacking) it for some hours. You must not ask me to say some conventional words over you. Search your own hearts in the silence to find, if you can, where you left the Spirit of God."

In two minutes of silence (some have spoken

A GALLERY OF CARICATURES

of it years afterward) we really prayed, and the ritual words with which we closed had meaning as we heard them:

"Almighty God, before Whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from Whom no secrets are hid, cleanse Thou the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit that we may more perfectly love Thee and more worthily magnify Thy Holy Name through Jesus Christ, our Lord."

We blaspheme the name of God when we take prayer upon our lips as a pious habit.

There is *Prayer as Organized Charities*. We start with the beautiful day; the birds and flowers and buzzing bees; make a missionary journey touching at Asia, the Fiji Islands, and darkest Africa; and end with "the President of the United States and all those associated with him in power." Here we are at public prayer, that most awe-full responsibility of a minister or religious leader. Most desecrated of functions outranking in carelessness even the reading of the Scriptures, and that is bad enough. With that part of the service they at least tell you beforehand what they want you to read. But with public prayer no warning seems necessary. Open the faucet and let words flow—words that taste of the rusted pipes.

We must not interrupt the conclusion of our

A GALLERY OF CARICATURES

picture gallery of past inadequacies by speaking now of how public prayer should be, except to say that the man who stands before a group of people and attempts to lead them together by an act of corporate worship and move them into the knowledge of God, is like a guide upon the trail. Presumably—pitiful it is if it is not true—the man knows something about God's presence. There is a place where the feet of his spirit have stood. He stands upon the trail near enough to the travelers on the way so that he knows where they are and what obstacles they face next.

There on the trail he reaches out his arms and calls, "You, who are there, this is the way; walk ye in it; God is—there." There is encouragement, and warning to be given; memory of other travelers, and of the object of the journey to be kept in mind. But public prayer is a corporate act in which we seek, as a united body, to understand better and to walk more strongly the Way of God.

It is not the breadth of public prayer that concerns me. It is the lack of depth. (To illustrate my meaning, there is placed at the end of this book a section called "Prayers in the Tabernacle.")

Most prayer is selfish. It is prayer with the "gimmies." God "gimme" this. God "gimme"

A GALLERY OF CARICATURES

that. It is on the low level of asking and receiving. It is on the existence level, a bread-line relationship with God. The point of my plea is this: *Stop using prayer as a petition.* Petition is easy. It soothes the conscience with the thought of something accomplished; it is Uriah Heepishly humble and abjectly grateful for small favors received. It is unworthy of the sons of God. We go on to that in the next chapter, making the point of view clearer, holding the white light of reason pitilessly upon these hiding places of contented spirits.

People say to me sometimes when I talk about these things, "Very right, very beautiful—for young people. They have not much to hang onto anyway. But for us—no, you take away the habits of years. I cannot start off into a new country. This satisfies. Leave me alone. Let the young people do that."

You may be as old as Abraham when his call came to him, but this does not allow you to settle down with rejoicing in the attainment of your spiritual life. It did not for Abraham. Think for a moment of what it meant for him. Abraham was seventy-five years old, Genesis tells us, when the voice of God told him to leave the familiar country of his whole life, to leave behind him his known, his lifelong experience, and

A GALLERY OF CARICATURES

to go into a land which he should receive afterward.

Can you imagine the shock that must have come to him? Again the Bible fools us with its brevity, its relation of mere events. God called. Abraham went. So the account. If we could only know what went on in his mind. If he was human, he had some strenuous thoughts. Let us put it in the realm of spiritual experience.

Here he was, seventy-five years old. He had built up through experience in childhood and manhood, from the teachings of his father, from the wise men of his generation, a certain practical habit of thought. He thought about God in a certain way. He had a regular habit of communion with Him, a habit of prayer. It satisfied. It made him feel comfortable. A sense of well-being was his as he looked over the vast fields of his experience with God and said, "I have done well."

Then came a call, a voice that stirred him strangely within: "Get thee up out of thy country [familiar to thee] and from thy kindred and from thy father's house [this way of living with God] into a land that I will show thee."

You see how he felt. "That takes away all the old familiar places. It makes me leave everything I have been doing. It takes me out of the place where I live [with God]. You give me

A GALLERY OF CARICATURES

nothing in its place, nothing but a road to travel, a wilderness way, the promise of a better land which I cannot see. I have no proof. O God, I cannot go! It frightens me! I am too old to travel new roads. New country is for the young. Leave me in my familiar land. Take me not away from the land of my fathers. It was good enough for them. It has satisfied me. God, I cannot go."

But he went—and in the going achieved a spiritual heritage which descends unto us. "And these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country. Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God."

YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY ALL

It is perhaps a commentary upon where prayer is really vital to us to find that the emphasis of the last chapter, in which we attempted to remove the petitionary element in prayer, took away for some, everything, and for so many, so much. All I tried to do was to get out of your minds the thought that prayer was a method of getting what you wanted from God. If in facing the knife-like edge of that gallery of caricatures, you found yourself unable to go through the accustomed form of prayer because you saw it as *Life Insurance Prayer*, or *Emergency Service*, or to an *Errand Boy God*, or *Spiritual Gymnastics* only; if you found yourself thinking about the *Card-catalogue* of an *Organized Charity*, or the *Push Button* of an electric circuit, as you spent your formal few moments in the conscious thought of God, then it is all to the good. You at least knew the area in which you were.

"You have taken away all!" some cry.

Have you never waited in silence while, like the waves on the ocean shore, the life you have lived has come back to you, a flood irresistible,

YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY ALL
overwhelming in its never ending flow of memory, until it seemed you could hardly stand it because, up till then, there had been so much that was unworthy?

"I seemed to stand alone, beside
A solemn kind o' sea.
Its waves they got in my inside,
And touched my memory,
And day by day, and year by year,
My life came back to me.
I seed just what I were, and what
I'd 'ad the charnce to be.
And all the good I might 'a' done,
An' 'adn't stopped to do.
I seed I'd made an 'ash of it,
And Gawd! but it were true."

A cockney soldier is facing the thought of the ever-present judgment day. Have you never had that aching desperation and then, suddenly, you realized that God was not going to blame you for what you *had* done; but calmly the realization would come—not what you have done—that's past. Good or bad it is sinking already into the valley of forgotten deeds. What are you? What next?

You have said no word, yet you have confessed all your sins. You have made no promises, yet you are reconsecrated. You come back

YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY ALL

to the consciousness of the world as if you had been on a journey to a far country. You take up the motion of life once more, knowing you are going to live it better. Have you never felt that in prayer?

Taken away all?

* * *

Have you never found yourself in the mood of the eighth Psalm? So small—yet important. Power over life in your hands. You count. You do not know why. It hardly seems possible, but you do.

Here is war. Here is the cruelty of Christian people over color. Here is the slavery of man doomed, by the industrial power we have not learned to control, to live a cog-like life and, disintegrating at last, to be thrown upon the dung-heap of a lunatic world. Here is the love of man for woman and woman for man, dropped in the sewer of man's misunderstanding, to be lifted back to the high place of clean beauty. Here is man with the potentiality of the son of God. It all seems so impossibly immense—the good and evil—what can *you* do? Yet you feel that you have to do all that you can do and that you must do something about these things because you are a son of God.

Then over you there comes the feeling—It does make a difference what I do.

YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY ALL

Out of the horror of seeing what man does
to men, haunted by the indelible sight of a man
lynched, strung up and burned, a Negro poet
writes the *Prayers of God*.

"Awake me, God! I sleep!

What was that awful word Thou saidst?

That black and riven thing—was it Thee?

That gasp—was it Thine?

This pain—is it Thine?

Are, then, these bullets piercing Thee?

Have all the wars of all the world,

Down all dim time, drawn blood from Thee?

Have all the lies and thefts and hates—

Is this Thy Crucifixion, God,

And not that funny, little cross,

With vinegar and thorns?

Is this Thy kingdom here, not there?

"Help!

I sense that low and awful cry—

Who cries?

Who weeps?

With silent sob that rends and tears—

Can God sob?

"Who prays?

I hear strong prayers throng by,

Like mighty winds on dusky moors—

Can God pray?

YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY ALL

"Prayest Thou, Lord, and to me?

Thou needest me?

Thou *needest* me?

Thou needest *me*?

Poor, wounded soul!

Of this I never dreamed. I thought—

"Courage, God,

I come!"

Have you never known yourself to be a
builder of the City of God?

Taken away all?

* * *

Have you never felt dumb with adoration, a
longing wonder at the amazing love of God
which Christ revealed? Saying with the quiet
exultation the hymn:

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,

That were a present far too small,

Love so amazing, so divine,

Demands my soul, my life, my all."

Taken away all?

* * *

Have you never felt in a fellowship of kindred
minds the curious fusing of yourself into the
universe and found the mystery of the com-
munion of the saints? Feel the power of the

YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY ALL
silence as Whittier gives it to us in "The Meeting" where

"To the calmly gathered thought,
The innermost truth is taught."

That "calmly gathered thought" is so like the quotation, "so seldom thoroughly self-collected," in *The Imitation*.

Then he goes on:

"And so I find it well to come
For deeper rest to this still room,
For here the habit of the soul
Feels less the outer world's control;
The strength of mutual purpose pleads
More earnestly our common needs,
And in this silence, multiplied
By these still forms on either side,
The world that time and sense have known
Falls off and leaves us God alone."

Taken away all?

* * *

I want to tell you about one of the most pathetic figures in the world, the Commonplace Prodigal. He is not dramatic in the manner of the Prodigal Son, who went off into a far country to waste his substance in riotous living. There was no movie scenario in his life's experience. The crowds will not throng to hear

YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY ALL

his story for there is none of the drama of obvious temptation and sin; no night club scenes; no bread-line in the rain; no park bench for a bed with newspapers for his covers. He was good, that elder son, respectable always, as you and I; as correct as a guide to a young man calling on an unattached female, as the Emily Posts of the gay nineties would put it, and about as interesting. He was stale, flat and unprofitable, wasting on the mediocrity of conventional goodness the gift of God.

There is no line in all the Bible more full of pathos than those words Jesus used to reveal the thwarted hunger of God. As the elder son stood there with frowning sullenness (he would not have known how to have enjoyed the party with his friends even if he had been given a kid with which to make merry; but he had the dog-in-the-mangerish attitude that no one was to get more than he did) the father looked on his boy. Can you see him standing there, the quiet look of longing love? He was not impatient with him. He did not take him by the shoulder and shake him and say harsh words about his stubborn selfishness. Looking upon him he said quietly, "My son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."

Jesus said, "That is God, and you and I."

There is portrayed the constant Presence of

YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY ALL

God; and ourselves, who have the potentiality of the sons of God.

"Father, give me that portion of thy goods which falleth unto me."

He gives it.

"Father, why didn't you give me a kid so that I could have thrown a party with my friends?"

"You could have had it, if that was what you wanted, Son."

Two sons! One went away into what the world called wickedness. One stayed at home in what the world called goodness. Neither was any better than a legal son of the father.

One prayed him, "Father, give me . . ." The other, "Father, why didn't you give me . . ."

"Give me . . ." "Give me . . ."

They wasted the gift of God—the world's Prodigals, the Commonplace Prodigals of the world.

It must have been a singularly unsatisfying reply to the elder son, "too blind," as Tennyson would have said, "too blind to have desire to see." He did not have enough comprehension of what his father was talking about even to misunderstand his words.

The attitude of the elder son is characteristic of that low point in a legal relationship which most of us go through with our earthly fathers. It comes ordinarily in the adolescent period of

YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY ALL

life. It struck me at about seventeen. Food to eat, clothes to wear, a roof to cover me, an education. Father knew I had need of these things. We freshmen had a fight in a movie house with the sophomores. The police were called in. "Father," came the call on the telephone frantically. He responded. Prom time came. "Father, give me, that I might have a party with my friends."

But I did not love him. It would have hurt if any one had told me that. If any one had questioned me, I would have insisted indignantly that of course I loved him. But I didn't. He was sick once and then I thought at last that I did really love him. But he got well, and I wasn't so sure again. All through those years his understanding was there. Life was happy in all the reasonable senses of the word; only one is so much alone when one is young—too much alone always.

Did you know in that tragic period that you were not a real son of your earthly father?

I could not go on that way. Life had to be changed. I did not change him. Earthly fathers need to be changed, too, sometimes. But he was like God in that respect. He did not need changing. I needed it.

I changed myself. Prayer is autosuggestion. People with strange obtuseness think you destroy

YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY ALL

God when you say that. They think you mean prayer is pure autosuggestion, nothing more. Prayer is autosuggestion; we do not shrink from the term. But it is something tremendously more. When I changed myself it was not in a vacuum. It was not a lonely process of pushing dumb-bells to exercise my spiritual muscles. It was a recognition in me, by me, that I was winning a relationship. Father did not change. I changed. But Father was. I could not have found the beauty of the relationship that did come (when he died there were few men as far apart in age who were closer than we were) if he had been a store dummy, a creature manufactured by my hands as an idol, or a figment of my imagination.

It is contact with a reality—God is and cares—which causes men to change.

We were in the finals of the state interscholastic crew championship one day. We had broken the course record and felt confident of winning. Father was in a meeting in the city that day but planned to slip out when the time for the race was scheduled that he might watch us.

Delays came; it began to rain. We were an hour late at the starting line and I forgot him.

Half way down the course No. 3 broke his oar. You do not need ever to have rowed to

YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY ALL

know the feeling of one who does not—cannot—pull his weight in the boat. Worse than that, the weight of the idle one jerks against you—back as you go forward, forward as you go back. Jesus said something one day about “he that is not with Me is against Me.”

It is bad enough in life but we are used to it there. In a racing shell, accustomed only to smoothness, it is agony. Down the stretch we came like a bird with a broken wing and finished only a quarter of a length behind.

Heartbroken, we turned the shell around. Wearily (a season had ended in failure) we started to paddle upstream again. Then on the farther bank of the Charles I saw a figure waving a hat. Too far off to distinguish features or form, he was—just a figure, away in the mist, waving his hat.

Suddenly the defeat of the moment didn't matter so much.

A cynic in the shell might have said in the bitterness of defeat (if I had spoken), “Aw, how do you know that's your father? It may be only a loafer on the bank.”

But I knew my father. It was like him to come way across the city and wait an hour in the rain; and although I did not see him until the next day, I knew. The memory of that

YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY ALL

moment helped me to keep searching for him when the lost sense of my adolescence came.

Like that is the search for God. We struggle down the course of life with a broken oar in the shell. We see Him but dimly in the mist of the farther bank.

Upon that analogy which is the one Jesus gave us, and which most of us know in our own experience, let me give you the first definite suggestion about how we may come into that better country. Later, in the chapter on "The Need of a Modern Monasticism," I shall spend the whole time in concrete suggestion of methods of prayer by which, through long experience with individuals, I know this changed life, this constantly growing life, can come. But here is a suggestion which was the one which began the change in life for me.

As with a sudden vision, as real as a burning bush or a blinding light on a Damascus road, there came the realization of what Jesus meant when He said, "When ye pray, say, 'Our Father.'" We think we know what it means—"Father"—we have said it so often. But we do not know. Almost as if a voice had spoken came the thought, "Why, that's the trouble with your prayers. They are as detached from your real life, as formal in their nature, as was your relationship with your father on earth."

YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY ALL

And then came the picture clearly. We are not bad when we are in the presence of our earthly fathers. It is a poor kind of a father in whose presence you can be bad. Neither are we bad when we *say* our formal prayers. We are in the conscious Presence of God. We promise Him as we promise our earthly fathers in our talks on what we have or haven't done, "All right, Father, I'll do better next time. I won't do this. I will do that."

We are not bad when we are at home. We can be, but the chances are good that the atmosphere will still retain the sense of the father who is proud of us and whose desires for us are high. We are not bad in church, not actively.

The place where we fall down is when we are out with the gang, when the ways of the world absorb us. When we are not in church and it is not Sunday, there is our place and time of need.

But we do not get the help. Prayer has been a time when we made promises or were ready with excuses. There ought to be something that could help me when I needed it so that the formal prayer at night could become more often the thankful realization that I had lived that day as a son of the Father. And here came the help.

My father gave me a name of honor. It is his name. It marks me as his son. No matter

YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY ALL

where I am my name is Chalmers. If I remember that, I cannot do some things the crowd would want me to do. It is not always easy to go straight. You live in the hell of war and see. A boy in a strange land, and a riotous world; and the insistent fingers of death clutching at him, and he wants to live and feel something of life before it slips away. God has gone. The church has not made the meaning of life vivid enough to hold. But my name is Chalmers. I am the son of my father.

Try this then. All through the day, not as a magic abracadabra, not as a "day by day in every way I am getting better and better," which is pure autosuggestion, not pretending to believe what you do not believe, but as the expression of a belief that you are trying to live out in the world, that Jesus was right in His revelation of God, the Father, say those words in your mind, "Son of God." In the subway as you sit waiting, "I'm a son of God. Am I?" In the chinks of your day, say to yourself, "Son of God. Was I? Did I act as one?" The temptation comes to do or to think evil. Quick as the light which flashes on from the storage battery when the subway train gets out of contact with power in going past a power point, let the thought flash out of your highest desires within, "I was almost

YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY ALL
out of contact with the best I could be. Son of
God!"

Take the first ten seconds of every business contact, while you go through the routine, "Mr. Blank, I am Mr. Jones." (You do not need to use your attention for that. You know who he is.) You say, "Good morning, Mr. Jones, sit down." That is as automatic as tying up your shoe. It does not take much energy to go through these preliminary salutations. Use the chinks in the moment of meeting to think, "I'm a son of God. He's a son of God."

Of course it will make life different. I assume you are intelligent and know that this is a suggestion which becomes vital only as you make use of it, or some adaptation of it. You cannot intelligently do that and not have it interfere in places.

Perhaps you do not want to change, after all. Perhaps it is better to stay outside as the elder son did. A boy had come back; and the father and his prodigal son were one. But the elder son, stagnant in the constant possibility of a radiant life, "would not go in." Poor eternal, Commonplace Prodigal!

THE NEED OF A MODERN MONASTICISM

It is fear, primarily—the fear that he is not having, and cannot have, an ordered life—that disturbs the idealist side in man's nature. This was the motive behind, and the excuse for, the monastic movement as it has cropped out again and again in the world's history. Despairing of the ability of a man who stays in the world of men to live the perfect life, or of men in association transforming the cities of men into the City of God, deeply concerned men of high vision (with the inevitable camp followers of those who were afraid of life and took this way of escape) drew apart in separate communities to try to make, there, an ideal world.

What they could not do in the factual world with its multiple fears and its jungle attitudes, these would create in a play world. They chose the simplicity of giving way to the one great fear—that the ideal life could not be lived in the world as it was—rather than the complexity of the many fears of ordinary life. They resolved that the world should at least have a picture of what ought to be, even if it had to be drawn

A MODERN MONASTICISM

with all the deliberate exclusions of the artist, who gives a sense of reality by omitting details. The walls of the monasteries were the frame of the picture.

However noble in purpose this withdrawal from the world was, we hardly need to emphasize that the underlying impression of the monastic movement upon the man on the street was defeatist. This is not a blanket indictment against a system. Many threads of high beauty have been woven into the fabric of history by the brilliant spirits of those days. But to the common man, the impression was clear-cut. It was a choice. The religious life was a separation from the world, the flesh, and the devil. To be holy, one must escape from this hopelessness which the world was. Simeon Stylites on his pillar is an unconscious caricature of this attitude, and, as all caricatures must be, is false to the whole in the emphasis on one outstanding characteristic; but with his arms, upheld in the form of adoration, becoming immovable at last through atrophy, he stands for us in this day as a warning of the danger in which we are, as individuals and as churches, when we find ourselves in a defeatist attitude and attempt to withdraw from, and thereby exclude, the world that is.

A MODERN MONASTICISM

This does not mean a physical monasticism. A physical monasticism is not our temptation. We, who at times have a hopeless feeling about our world, only rarely choose, no matter how we might long for, physical monasticism to escape from it. Jesus in that great prayer as interpreted to us by John, said, "I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world." We cannot become monks. We must stay in this world in which a monastic spirit is inescapable; but we must be sure that the inevitable choice we must make of the spiritual world we live in, is made in a spirit that is not contemptuous or bitter, but understanding and hopeful. We must *stick it* even when we cannot see the end, as long as we have any hope that we can gain on life.

King Arthur expresses it for us as he sees his Knights of the Round Table leaving him to go out on their individual quests for the Holy Grail, and, gazing at the empty chairs of the day's common tasks, he says:

"My greatest hardly will believe he saw.
Another hath beheld it afar off,
And, *leaving human wrongs to right themselves,*
Cares but to pass into the silent life.
And one hath had the vision face to face,
And now his chair desires him here in vain,
However they may crown him elsewhere.

A MODERN MONASTICISM

"And some among you held that if the King
Had seen the sight he would have sworn the
vow.

Not easily, seeing that the King must guard
That which he rules, and is but as the hind
To whom a space of land is given to plow,
Who may not wander from the allotted field
Before his work is done."

So spake the King: "I knew not all he meant."

*(Perhaps it would be wise to read that slowly again
before reading on. Poetry is such concentrated truth
that we should not gobble it as we do prose.)*

The last line is a poetic ending. We do know
what he meant, you and I. When high visions
come we cannot go running after them. We
must make them live in the common day. And
when so often we cannot make the visions live
in the common day, and it does not seem we
can even die, yet we know deep down inside
that we have to *stick it* even when others desert.

A Jewish king walked upon the ramparts of
a beleaguered city. The people slept. They
were hungry and would wake to cry for bread.
They were discouraged and would wake to
blame the king. Zedekiah voiced the feeling of
all rulers and leaders of mankind. To the voice-
less stars he looked, and calling into the eternal
silence for a reason and a way to guide the

A MODERN MONASTICISM

people, knew at last the bitter-sweet prerogative of kings:

"Below is sleep. Above is silence."

As the city wakes to a new day, to be a monk in a place apart would be the easy way.

It is a way you and I cannot take. Our job is not to go back to the old monasticism but to discover a modern equivalent for making life possible for a decent man to live in. To discover a way, a method, if you like, call it even a technique, to help the busy man to keep the monastic spirit of being in the world, yet not of it. To find out why we who call ourselves Christians are not different from those who do not call themselves Christians; and how we can become what we profess.

This, as some of you have already recognized, is the whole point of this book. This the reason why there is the urge within me to have you leave the old routines of prayer *unless* you know that you are making progress in your ability to see and your power to walk the way that is Christlike.

It is a matter of constant thought, of sleeplessness occasionally, of some bewilderment, that men so often cannot see that which is to many of us so clear; or, seeing, see only negatives. Something is wrong with us, who do see, when we cannot make our faith so vivid that men and

A MODERN MONASTICISM

women, stuck in the viscous ruts of past inadequacies, shall again find the energy of their lives has traction and pull themselves and their world out of the mudhole of hopelessness. The New Earth is right around the corner. "Yes," say the cynics, "like prosperity." But cynic or idealist, derision or decision, it is so. Somehow, we who have glimpsed the meaning of God must re-order our lives so that men will see. If we are to do this we must realize a truth about life contained in the expression: The practice of the Presence of God.

It is an old, old grouping of words—older than Brother Lawrence's famous pamphlet on the theme, old as Israel, old as Adam—The Practice of the Presence of God. Like Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, it has a cold and mechanical sound but let no one neglect its necessity as a factor in vital religious experience.

This does not mean that we should all practice in the same way. In the days of my youth there was still the hangover from those days when to enjoy one's duty was almost sinful. One was not supposed to enjoy piano lessons, for example, as one did football practice; one was only expected to do it. "Have you done your practicing?" was as revealing an expression as "Eat your spinach" became later. To practice the Presence of God

A MODERN MONASTICISM

implies that it is a solemn and somewhat hated duty which must be done.

Men have carried over into all religious observances the sense of the small boy watching the clock that he might run from piano practicing to football practice. Somehow, it never occurred to the small boy that, what he hated and what he loved, both had the same name.

The artist's passion for perfection which never tires; the sense that a famous scientist called "demonic possession" which absorbed him wholly so that time became relative and unimportant as he worked on his investigations and he never had to push himself to his task by any effort of will; the absorption of the searcher for truth which made Lightfoot in *Wings over Europe* speak of a discovery as "a five year long short cut"; all these high evidences of the meaning of practice are lost to the common mind.

We mean by the practice of the Presence of God what Robert Norwood meant when he described Jesus as "the man who was at ease with God." There must be the sense of the accustomed, the familiar, in men's religion. God is not an awkward moment; a pious interruption in the work-a-day world; company manners and Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes. This feeling about God, like the solemn talks we have with our children on "what a young child ought to

know," can be as fatal to true religion as is a boy at his scales in danger of missing the love of music.

Our experience of religion, our contact with God, should lead us to a fulfillment of the Psalmist's "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High" without losing the difficult emphasis of the prayer of Jesus according to John that we be not taken out of the world. To be in the world and not of it is not the ultimate meaning of life; but as long as the world is as it is, this extraordinary spiritual monasticism of Jesus is a method of transforming the world. It is an art and not an instinct; or, rather, since those words can easily be vague in the mind, may be a combination of both mysteries and is at any rate an expression of life that one must practice for its form, and know the technique of its attainment.

The following pages will make suggestions. They are not rules and regulations. Certainly, they do not attempt to be inclusively exclusive. Much less would they claim to be a correspondence course in "How to Know God in Ten Easy Lessons—Money back if not satisfied." If you have ever tried to teach an awkward boy how to pick up a bounding ball or suffered with Jo in *Little Women* as she tried to show Amy how to faint, you will realize that there are no guar-

A MODERN MONASTICISM

anted techniques or formulæ by which God is known. You can teach people the motions, but not the emotions, of life.

It has been the pathetic hope of conventional men that they could transmit their forefathers' authentic passion to the children of the third and fourth generations by making them repeat the forms and ceremonies which have become traditional. A young member of the Society of Friends revealed unconsciously how we must not trust to forms. From a long line of distinguished Quakers one would suppose her to have by nature, and she is generally accepted as having by right of blood, knowledge of the working of the Spirit. She made this comment on the Meeting. "We were sitting there and nothing was happening." Now maybe nothing was. We do not attain understanding nor are we laid hold on by the spirit merely because we sit silently in the Meeting House copying our ancestors. Such silence is only "skin deep." If the great experience of the Friends was having its expression, however, she was greatly mistaken. Something was happening and she did not know even *that* it was, to say nothing of *what* it was.

Will you start, therefore, with an attitude? Unless you can prove to your own inner honesty that you are making the greatest possible advance in the knowledge of and contact with

A MODERN MONASTICISM

what you mean by God and feel that you can show definite progress in what He means to you, change whatever your practice is in prayer.

Can you prove to your own honest self that your prayers are making you progressively a more effective witness of Christian living? Be honest—set it down on paper—it will not take a long time—the definite achievement in Christian experience which you have made in the last year. Supposing, as is tragically true for many, that prayer has made no change. Then deliberately stop that particular habit of prayer.

But people say, "Is not some form of prayer, however ineffective, better than nothing?"

No! That which produces nothing is worth nothing—to all practical purposes it is nothing. Our job is to become revealers of God—a God worthy of man's adoration. It is for us to show men by the way we live what Christianity means. If we are not doing it, we do not lose anything by giving up nothing.

But does not the form of religion hold man, even so, from worse things? He may make no progress, but might he not slip into worse things, if he does not use prayer to hold his own?

Again, no! Thomas à Kempis answers sadly as he comments on men and religion: "Our Christian lives ought to increase daily; but now

A MODERN MONASTICISM

it is accounted a great matter if a man can retain but some small part of his first zeal."

Do you not realize that we are losing ground by standing still? The Beloved Community—The City of God—is nothing which just happens. We do not drift into righteousness; that we know right well.

The honesty of doing nothing is better than the dishonesty of doing, as a complacent form, that which means nothing. Therefore, if you cannot show to any honest person, even to that most sympathetic, honest self, a change that startles you, be receptive in your attitude to a change in method.

For that matter, change anyway. We get into the ruts even of goodness and let what is well enough keep us from the best. If your present practice of the Presence of God is vital, you cannot lose it by approaching the Infinite by some other way for a while. Try it, if for nothing else than to show your fellowmen that there are many ways man may take into the Presence of God.

When we let religion become fixed in form, we make tragedy for those about us and those who follow after.

"I wish I could pray standing and looking up instead of kneeling, and bowing my head, and

A MODERN MONASTICISM

closing my eyes," one young person wrote me, "but *they* tell me that isn't prayer."

It is obvious that what is accomplished by prayer is the giving of a moment of conscious contact between oneself and God. We must put that object central in our thinking and let no superficial matters obscure it.

We must, therefore, have clearly in mind that there is nothing sacred in any particular passage of time. It is no more necessary to give the last, or the first, few waking moments out of every twenty-four hours to the habit of talking to, or thinking in the consciousness of the Presence of, God than it would be to give the last fifteen seconds out of every hour, or the first hour out of every month. If God is as intelligent as we claim He is, and He is undoubtedly more intelligent than we have any comprehension, He is interested neither in the regularity nor the frequency of our saying of prayers to Him, but in the growth of our understanding and willingness to coöperate with Him. How any one whose conception of God is even as high as Olympus, to say nothing of the Psalmist's Holy Hill, could object to that thesis, is difficult to see. To pray once a day may be the best period-of-attention, but the object of prayer is not to observe a tradition, it is to see God.

The first suggestion, therefore, is going to be

A MODERN MONASTICISM

that you be sure you are not wasting whatever time you now use in prayer. We can see this reflected to ourselves in the mirror of a young people's discussion group.

They were analyzing themselves to find out what they were doing then in their practice of prayer. Most of them were still praying once a day. The time of day was usually at night; the time out of the day two minutes; the type of prayer was represented by this model:

"God, bless Father and Mother; brother and sister; thank you for this and that; I'm sorry I was cross to John and talked back to Aunt Susie; help me to be a good boy [or girl] tomorrow; for Jesus' sake, Amen."

"Could you repeat the same prayer over and over for an hour?" I asked. They were a little startled.

"Why, no," they said, "of course not."

Yes, obviously, "Of course not."

"How long would you retain a friend to whom you always said the same thing hastily as you stopped a moment on the street?" was the next question.

I have a classmate whom I meet on the street or in the hotel lobby about once a year. This is our routine. "Well [rising inflection in the voice], what are you doing here? Haven't seen you for a coon's age. We ought to have lunch

A MODERN MONASTICISM

together some day. Ring me up. So long. Glad to have seen you." Any dweller in a large city knows this line.

The last time we met I held up my hand as we bumped into each other, and said, "Don't say it." We haven't had lunch yet, but at least we did not sound as moronic as two of Hemingway's characters while we talked.

To talk to God as if you were an old phonograph record with a groove in it, or even as if you were a musical chair, that always played the same tune when you sat in it, would pall upon any intelligent being after a while, no matter how pretty the tune.

The young people got the point at once. "What shall we do?" was the immediate question, and here is what was proposed. Take the same amount of time you now give each week to God in prayer (two minutes a day it was for that group, fourteen a week; they agreed that they probably used an extra minute sometime during the week, and that we could honestly make it fifteen minutes, so that we could call it an even quarter of an hour, without stretching the truth) and use that weekly time to some effect. Pray only once a week, hereafter, for one quarter of an hour. If that is not time enough to make a vital contact with God, pray

A MODERN MONASTICISM

once a month for one hour. They were being asked for not one second more of conscious attention in their relationship between themselves and God than they were already giving. All I asked was that they should not waste the time that they were already giving to Him.

It was interesting to see how shocked they were at first at the thought of going through a day without saying a prayer. "Pray only once a week?" they said, and they sat there a little dazed at the thought.

Yet consider! For a while you are going to pray only once a week. Say it to yourself: "I'm going to have only one chance to talk with God this week."

Pray once a week! Can you see how there might store up for you a longing like unto that which a man away from home might have as he hungers for the sight of his family? There might come over you the thrilling expectancy of awaiting the arrival of a friend returning from a trip away. Think how you say: "In two days I shall see him." . . . "Tomorrow I shall talk with him." . . . "He is coming today." . . . "Oh, there you are; sit down and tell me everything." (Spiritual breathlessness comes over you. You look at each other and heave a deep sigh of satisfaction.)

A MODERN MONASTICISM

We do not have such a feeling about prayer, and we ought to. Take time enough when you take any time, not to waste it in the chatter of the commonplace.

It is important to realize that word, "waste." People sometimes accuse me of wasting time because my interviews with troubled spirits are not limited by a rigid appointment schedule. "You could have gotten rid of her in fifteen minutes," is one way they express it.

Yes, if I did not mind wasting that fifteen minutes, it could be done. If "getting rid of her" was the important thing, it could have been done. Yet sometimes I have waited for hours in order not to waste the fifteen minutes originally asked for, which was, as a matter of fact, all that was really needed. Maybe some day when I have learned more skill I can help people quickly. It would be a queer doctor, wouldn't it, though, who stopped in the middle of an operation because it was time for lunch? Wasted time is not measured by the clock, but by effectiveness. "A thousand years are but as a day when it is past" for man, too, sometimes; and in some decades eternity hardly seems too big a word for its measure.

Do you feel better about the thought of praying only once a week? I shall suggest to you

A MODERN MONASTICISM

later that you learn how to pray once an hour.

"What shall we do with this fifteen minutes a week?" was the next question. Let us attempt to answer that question as we turn to

"HOW TO PRACTICE THE PRESENCE OF GOD."

THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

To think of methods of prayer as a mechanism is not only abhorrent to the good conscience of man, but is stupidly unintelligent. The whole relationship would thereby be tainted with a cold and calculated, with an almost hypocritical, feeling which is self-defeating.

Man struggles, sometimes even against his own desire and his real self-interest, to avoid any process whose steps seem to lead him inevitably to a predetermined result. Even determinists practice a transcendence over the logic of their ideas.

With this instinctive protest of the human spirit against a mechanistic world, my whole being is in harmony.

Even if I did know some magic formula by which all men could be brought to the knowledge of God, I would not use it—as a formula. If we rightly interpret the mind of God as revealed by Jesus, this is fundamental in God's ways with man: i.e., God does not cheapen man's relationship with Himself by compelling man to choose His way. *Freedom is the chance God*

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

took when He made man; and freedom is the chance man must take if he is to become like God.

This is a fundamental concept in a religion worthy of our allegiance, and I shall want to say more about it later. Let me merely assert, for the present, with all the emphasis possible, that, although we are to look now for a while at methods by which a man who wants to make contact with God can effectively achieve his purpose, we are thinking of these techniques as adequate tools placed in the hands of an artist rather than as a modern machine into one end of which you feed raw material that out of the other a standardized product may pop.

Being tools, rather than an efficient machine, these "methods," if not used intelligently, can mar, as well as create, beauty. Ignatius Loyola warned those who used his *Spiritual Exercises* that they should not use the book in a cut-and-dried manner but rather with a certain adaptation to the inquirer's character and circumstances. As a matter of fact, Loyola never intended the book to be used as a handbook of devotions, as *The Imitation* is used, but rather as a guide-book for those directing the "exercises." It was a teachers' manual rather than a textbook to be placed in the hands of the learner.

Likewise we would warn all who search

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

further in these pages that unless you see and make your own the spirit which gives these methods life, no enduring value will be found. Having said that, however, it is wise to add that all these warnings about the attitude being more important than the method should not blind us to the fact that some method is necessary.

Since we can all agree that there is an apartness of man from God, obviously our method normally and logically begins with some way by which we may become vividly aware of God. The approach to God is, therefore, a necessity and usually can be considered a first necessity. The word "usually" is inserted because sometimes one approaches God by an indirect thought process. We are for the moment, however, thinking of the first steps in a conscious effort to make contact with the Most High.

Withdrawal is the word we must think of first. We must turn toward—reach out toward—move toward—God. No one of us is so lacking in a sense of values that he would claim himself to be constantly in full understanding of the Most High God. This implies that almost always we must turn from—withdraw from—whatever we are doing or thinking. Ideally, this would not be so; but practically our finiteness seems as different from the nature of infinity as is time apart from an eternity of which it should be a part.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, saith the Lord," is stating a fact, not an ideal.

He, therefore, that is trying to dwell "in the secret place of the Most High" may be squeezed into the same vestibule of the subway with one who is living "midst horrid shapes and shrieks and sights unholy." They are apparently in the same place but—as Jesus points out in the case of the two men who had gone up to the same temple to pray, and who might even have been saying the same word prayers—they are so far apart in spirit that one had a chance, at least, of finding heaven, while the other was condemned by his own insensitiveness to remain in the dull hell of his own low desires.

The dweller in the secret place has withdrawn from the obvious presence of his low plane neighbor into an unseen reality.

"There is a viewless, cloistered room,
As high as heaven and as fair as day,
Where, though my feet may join the throng,
My soul can enter in and pray.

One hearkening even cannot know
When I have crossed that threshold o'er,
For He alone who hears my prayer
Has heard the shutting of the door."

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

This withdrawal (this is very important) is to a familiar, or just beyond the familiar, locale. We use that word to give the significance of state of being as well as place of existence. That this workroom of the spirit shall not be too far removed from one's accustomed locale is of vital importance. Religion's great danger is, that, without meaning to, it furnishes an escape from this end of reality to an unconnected reality at the other end of the road and life remains always in compartments. So much spiritual energy is wasted because people forget the excellent ruling of the King when the White Rabbit asks him where he shall begin. "Begin at the beginning," he said, "and go on until you come to the end; then stop." We so often begin with God, the end, rather than with man—with ourself as one of him and the world where we are.

We know that when we want to climb a mountain, we must face the upward trail and put one foot before the other. We forget that fact in seeking the knowledge of God. When approaching God, set your feet in the highest spiritual locale you know. Go at once to the frontier of spiritual attainment but be honest in not pretending to be where you know you are not.

This locale may be reached and the way ahead

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

explored by at least three suggested methods all of which may overlap on each other.

TIME: Thomas à Kempis says, "If thou canst not continually recollect thyself [obviously the ideal state, which is implied in Jesus' words, 'Pray without ceasing'] do it sometimes, at least once a day. In the morning fix thy good purpose; and at eventide examine thy ways, how thou hast behaved thyself this day in word, deed, and thought; for in these perhaps thou hast oftentimes offended both God and thy neighbor, and knew it not.

"Let us do the best we can, we shall still easily fail in many things. Yet must we always purpose some certain course, and especially against those failings which do most of all hinder us.

"Daily ought we to renew our purpose, and to stir up ourselves to fervor, as though we had for the first time today entered the religious life, saying,

"'Help me, O Lord God! in this my good purpose, and in Thy holy service; and grant that I may now this day begin perfectly, knowing that what I have done hitherto is as nothing.'"

Here is the psychological soundness of the Angelus—the morning watch, the Mass, any set

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

hours of public worship or hours of prayer—which has great value if one can avoid, while doing it, the danger of having these “times” become as meaninglessly mechanical as a child’s prayer which has become habit killed. The ideal will be to arrive at that spiritual achievement where one will not need times of withdrawal because one dwells continuously in the Presence, but until one has reached that perfect state we need to “Take time to be holy.”

PLACE: To speak of the church as a place where the sensitive soul may meet God is so obvious that it is unnecessary. Yes, I know the cynical things one might say about the church being the last place to meet God; but a seeking soul can find Him if he will let himself think less bitterly about man and more expectantly about God. This is not the place to argue that, however.

We are thinking rather of another psychological soundness of religious practice notably evidenced in the Roman Catholic Church in their Stations of the Cross, but applied with greater effectiveness to the work-a-day needs of men in such ways as this. I make it concrete first.

For some years I have been using the entrance into the subway as a place of communion.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Doubtless many of you know the poem of
Chester Firkins called "On a Subway Express."

"I, who have lost the stars, the sod,
For chilling pave and cheerless light,
Have made my meeting-place with God
A new and nether Night—

"Have found a fane where thunder fills
Loud caverns, tremulous;—and these
Atone me for my reverend hills
And moonlit silences.

"A figment in the crowded dark,
Where men sit muted by the roar,
I ride upon the whirring Spark
Beneath the city's floor.

"In this dim firmament, the stars
Whirl by in blazing files and tiers;
Kin meteors graze our flying bars,
Amid the spinning spheres.

"Speed! speed! until the quivering rails
Flash silver where the head-light gleams,
As when on lakes the Moon impales
The waves upon its beams.

"Life throbs about me, yet I stand
Outgazing on majestic Power;
Death rides with me, on either hand,
In my communion hour.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

"You that 'neath country skies can pray,
Scoff not at me—the city clod;—
My only respite of the Day
Is this wild ride—with God."

To take that poem as an interesting item to be tossed aside as carelessly and forgotten as soon as a column in the daily paper, is to miss its suggestive value.

Let me carry on the suggestion of the *Via Dolorosa* mixed with the cadence of a big city. Do it by adding, to your thinking about Place, the so-called "dead-line" beyond which no known criminal is allowed to pass in certain parts of a big city. As automatic as a policeman's picking up of a thief or a good Catholic's recognition that he is passing a church, let your entrance into the subway be a place of reminder. Into the confusion and the pressure of daily life you, a professed Christian, are going;—going, but to what? You know we might as well quit this business of religion, if we cannot answer that question. It is not that we claim the answer is easy to make or to face; but we do believe that man has no chance of ever knowing God unless he has some idea of the next step in finding the meaning of life.

But we are entering the subway and attempting to make it a chapel. Here in contrast but

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

in similarity are linked meditations (composed outside either place) to be used in both.

IN CHURCH

If ever we need Thee—God—it is here. Outside in the work of the world, we are driven to a sense of our own weakness—our inability to live what we see. We know how far our acts fall below our ideals.

We are in danger, then, we know. We are in danger of quitting; of thinking it is no use. The contrasts of life are so obvious and the gap so impossible as we look at it. Thy way, O Lord? We cannot do it. It is too high. We cannot attain unto it. Thus we cry. And yet—we cannot get away completely.

But here, O God, it can seem so easy. We can put fine clothes upon our bodies and fine words upon our lips. We can bring a pious offering and come into the courts of the Lord. We can feel the swelling notes of radiant music, we can soothe ourselves in the majestic beauty of too familiar Scripture and in the sonorousness of glib words. We can pray—with words—how futile—fitting old phrases into new patterns as if we were doing something. The light is dim and religious. We are apart—sheltered—unreal.

Keep us, Lord, from that smothering danger.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

The words we say here before Thee are not "all right for Church" and to be forgotten because they do not mean anything outside. They do not mean anything here, unless they mean something outside. God, may we remember, that we must pray with our lives that the words of our mouths may not insult Thy name.

Out of the rut of the accustomed, may we say with new earnestness—

"Our Father Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."

* * *

IN A SUBWAY

God of all Power, I am so powerless. Buried in the machinery of man, I move in grooves. I rub elbows with all kinds and conditions of men. Faces—sorrowful and sordid, joyous and strong, worn out and weary, radiant with life—stare at me and I at them. They mean nothing to me; I nothing to them.

As in olden days men looked at the heavens and saw the myriad stars and cried out in be-

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

wilderness, "What is man that Thou art mindful of him?" so we look at massed humanity and wonder whether it is worth while to care about right and truth any more; whether individuals count.

The crush grows thicker. We can scarcely breathe. We are lost in the pressure. Even our own bodies do not seem to belong to us. We are without order or meaning; waste pieces jumbled in a box.

"I cried . . . unto the Lord. Thou hast cast me into the deep . . . the depths close me round about . . . I went down to the bottom of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me forever."

Suddenly we realize that we have traveled more than twenty-one hundred years. We find a hot-eyed idealist at our elbow who looks with horror at the evil and confusion of a great city. We hear the age-old cry, "The nations are counted as the small dust of the balance," and one hundred more years are past. How long, O Lord, how long?

Then came a voice saying, "Who touched Me?" And they said unto Him, "Thou seest the multitude thronging Thee, and sayest Thou, 'Who touched Me?'" And He looked about and saw the *one* who had touched Him and He healed her.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

O Lord, our God, keep us sensitive in the midst of the multitude to the man.

* * *

Conscious, then, that the subway ride does not need to be a dull endurance, but can be a place of preparation for the daily life, we go on with another suggestion.

Life has been easier for me since I discovered that one can sing in a subway. You do not move your lips—no appreciable sound is heard above the decibels of this monster in whose “belly” (read your Jonah) you are swallowed up. Yet in your head you can feel the song. Mendelssohn’s “Hear My Prayer” has long been my introit; Bach’s “Breathe on me, Breath of God,” my prayer; and a musical phrase from Palestrina adapted to a wording of my own arrangement, my benediction.

All this is just to demonstrate that you need not be defeated by the pressure of this high-speed life we live. The subway chapel is only a concrete example of the principle that you can—must—make your “place” of prayer where you live. When a man says, as they often do, “I could not stay in your city. I would lose my soul,” he is forgetting that by such an admission he is confessing a weakness in the spirit of man in his search for God even if he does not imply that the knowledge of God is dependent

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

upon the monasticism of a retreat or to the dim and hushed atmosphere of the sanctuary.

In regular time or accustomed place, or without either, there is a third method of the approach to God.

RITUAL: Here I am thinking particularly of accustomed words. Many are the passages of Scripture which are valuable for this purpose. The treasures of the Psalms, other beauty spots of the Bible so familiar to you that it is almost an insult to open the Book to read these words so vividly are they seen by the eye of memory, will be your tools now. Particularly are those passages useful which bring you, as the forty-sixth Psalm does, to the words "Be still."

Two examples are given to show how one can piece together or adapt the Scripture to meet particular groups or situations. This is a Call to Worship we use often at the Tabernacle:

"Lord, who shall abide in Thy Tabernacle?

And who shall dwell in Thy holy hill?

He that hath clean hands,

And a pure heart,

Who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity,

Nor sworn deceitfully.

"Lord, who shall abide in Thy Tabernacle?

And who shall dwell in Thy holy hill?

He that walketh uprightly,

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

And worketh righteousness,
And speaketh the truth in his heart.

"Be still, and know that God is."

(Psalms fifteen, twenty-four and forty-six are recognized here with slight adaptations to make application to our own people more direct.)

Another Call to Worship, oft repeated, is this, based on Micah's best-known verses:

"How shall we enter into the Presence of the
Eternal?

How shall we bow before the God of Life (or
Love, or Light)?

Shall we come before Him with the ritual of
words?

Shall we recognize Him only with gestures of
the body?

He hath shown thee, O man, what is good.

And what does the Lord require of thee?

To do justly;

To love kindness;

To walk in quiet fellowship with God."

Even as we make adequate preparation in church for the adventure of knowing God, so we should in private times of meditation be sure we are in the mood to approach Him. As an aid in this approach *ritual* is a short cut through the accustomed to the edge of the unknown.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

This is the first step in the practice—and the adventure—of the Presence of God. At first it may take you the whole fifteen minutes to make an adequate approach to Him, and even then you may not succeed, but after a while you can pass in a moment over hard-won spiritual territory.

Read the story of the climbing of Mt. Blanc, for example. That which was once so impossible that no one dreamed of attempting it, became after a while a difficult and dangerous—but possible—achievement for hardy mountaineers until at last it is called “an easy day for a lady.”

In the record of the Everest climbs we find that later expeditions, almost unconscious of the marvel of what they did, put their rest camps on the spots to which previous climbers had reached only in deadly peril, had clung by desperate effort, and to which they had held but for a moment.

Now, above those spots that had once seemed the ultimate achievement of man's endurance, they brought their tents and lay down to rest with minds and hearts set upon the summit above.

All this is a process which comes with time and one must not wait supinely until the first step is fully attained before trying the next.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

The next step into which you may eventually have to venture, even if the first step is dimly realized or even a little unreal, is the Contemplation of Oneself in the Thought of God.

Where am I?

What is it that keeps me from the highest expression of my faith?

Take *The Imitation of Christ* as a possible guide here.

MY FLESH CRIETH OUT UNTO THE LIVING GOD

"I will confess against myself mine own unrighteousness;

I will confess my weakness unto Thee, O Lord.
Oftentimes a small matter it is that casteth me down.

I resolve that I am going to act with courage,
but then a small temptation cometh,
and I am at once in a great strait.

It is sometimes a very trifle,
yet a heavy temptation arises from it.
And whilst I am thinking myself tolerably safe,
And when I have not recognized a temptation,
I sometimes find myself almost entirely overcome

even by a slight breath.
Behold, therefore, O Lord, my low estate,

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

And my frailty which is every way known
unto Thee.

Have mercy on me, and deliver me out of the
mire,

that I stick not fast therein,

that I remain not utterly cast down for ever.

This is that which sometimes striketh me back-
wards,

And confoundeth me in Thy sight,

that I am so subject to fall,

so weak in resisting my passions.

And although I do not altogether consent,

Yet their continual assaulting is troublesome
and grievous unto me;

And it is exceedingly weary to live thus daily
in conflict.

Most mighty God, Thou zealous Lover of
all faithful souls! O that Thou wouldst
consider the labor of Thy servants, and
stand by them in all things, to whatsoever
they reach forward! Strengthen us with
heavenly courage, lest the miserable flesh,
not as yet fully subject to the Spirit, pre-
vail and get the upper hand.

Alas, what a life is this, against which it
seems needful for me to fight, so long as I
breathe."

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

THE SOUL THOROUGHLY SELF-COLLECTED

"Above all things, with exceeding humility of heart, and with suppliant reverence, with a full faith, and holy intention to do honor to God, man ought to seek God's Presence.

"Examine diligently thy conscience, and to the utmost of thy power purify and make it clear, with true contrition and humble confession; so as thou mayest have no burden, nor know anything that may breed in thee remorse of conscience, and hinder thy free drawing near.

"Think with displeasure of all thy sins in general, and more particularly, if time allow, confess unto God in the secret of thine heart all that keeps thee from Him.

"We are:

So much inclined to outward things,
so negligent in things inward:

So lightly moved to laughter and unbridled mirth,

so hardly to mourning about our world
and feeling inward contrition at its condition:

So prompt to ease and pleasures of the flesh,

so dull to zeal and strictness of life:

So curious to hear what is new, and to see
what is beautiful,

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

so slack to embrace what is humble and
mean:

So covetous of abundance, so niggardly in
giving,

so close in keeping things to ourselves:

So inconsiderate in speech,

so reluctant to keep silence:

So unruly in manners,

so fretful in conduct:

So eager about food,

so deaf to the word of God:

So swift to take rest,

so slow to labor:

So suddenly moved to anger,

so apt to take displeasure against an-
other:

So ready to judge,

so severe to reprove:

So joyful at prosperity,

so weak in adversity:

So quickly distracted,

so seldom thoroughly self-collected:

So often making many good resolutions,

and yet bringing them at last to so poor
effect.

"These and thy other defects being confessed,
then with full resignation and with thy entire
will, offer up thyself to the honor of God's

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Name, on the altar of thy heart a perpetual whole burnt offering, even thy body and soul, faithfully committing all that is within thy control unto God."

This public prayer centered on this need is also suggestive of the way one's mind will seek to escape the pressure of a high idea. It is reproduced as it was printed in the meditation page of the monthly church magazine we call the *Tidings*:

(If you cannot take time to read this slowly, turn the page at once. You are wasting time to glance at the Meditation quickly. There is much that is written for him who goes on hasting feet, but he who runs cannot read this message. Better to save it for some quiet time that never comes, than to snatch at its meaning!)

God—what would happen if we really found Thee? We do not change very much with all our talking in prayer. We are just about where we were last year as far as what we call "Thy Kingdom" is concerned. Perhaps we are too conscious of our words.

"We don't know what to say," we say.

As if saying words meant we were in touch with Thee!

What have you done?

"Wait, God, do not ask us that—we are trying to say our prayers. *You* must listen to *us*:"

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Almighty and Everlasting God, we have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too often the devices and desires of our own hearts, we have offended against Thy holy laws. We have done those things we ought not to have done, and we have left undone those things we ought to have done. Have mercy upon us! Through Jesus Christ our Lord!

"There, God, we've said our prayers. It makes us feel better."

What have you done?

"Done? Let me think."

God is asking what have you done this year to make this world more like the world that Christ revealed.

* * *

We hear the cries of men:

.....
"But, God, I am too old. I have done my work."

And Abraham was seventy-five when he, through faith, searched for a land of Promise.

.....
"But, God, I am too young."

And He was only thirty-three when He died.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

"But, God, I am too busy."

About what?

(Read no more for two minutes while you answer that question.)

"Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
Forgive our feverish ways;
Reclothe us in our rightful mind;
In purer lives Thy service find,
In deeper rev'rence, praise.

"Drop Thy still dews of quietness
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace."

God, help us to see that life is not a careless chance. That if we do not, by the strength of a purposeful spirit, move toward Thee, we drift aimlessly away, and the world has that much harder job in becoming Thy Kingdom which we pray about.

Having tried to see yourself in the eyes of God, here is a third aid to advance. We might call it Adventures in Love. The thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians could be the mountain peak of spiritual experience, whose majesty

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

and mystery would pull you on to attempt its summit. Read it slowly and thoughtfully.

Then hold in your mind some insight from the poets such as this bit out of Countee Cullen's "Shroud of Color":

"I am not brave enough to pay the price
In full; I lack the strength to sacrifice.
I who have burned my hands upon a star,
And climbed high hills at dawn to view the far
Illimitable wonderments of earth,
I am not brave enough to pay the price in full."

Or place before yourself in copy or in memory a great picture such as Watt's "For He Had Great Possessions."

Let your mind now begin to widen the areas of your spiritual knowledge. Adventure beyond the frontier of your present achievement. Let your thought go where it will with the idea of love.

My love and Race. Where am I there?

My love and Money.

My love and Poverty.

My love and Jealousy.

My love and Ambition.

Take your own nearest sin of omission.

As you go on for a while in contemplation let this question come in: What next? You must

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

see that clearly before you can creatively effect life.

Do not force your decisions. Too much religious conviction has been forced. We do not have patience with ourselves or others and demand decisions before we are ready.

When William Wilberforce first learned about the conditions of slavery in the British Empire there were undoubtedly those who impatiently demanded his support of their convictions. This, Wilberforce would not give. There is a most interesting comment made about him at this time: "He knew, but was not haunted by conditions."

It is one of the disturbing factors in the soul's search for God that we demand too hasty an acceptance of Him. Like a friendship forced or metal improperly annealed, God and the knowledge of His righteousness evades the too importunate spirit, or the impatiently hasty process. More will be said about this when we come to the chapter on "The Distance to God." We cannot too strongly emphasize that an impatient forcing of an issue often leaves an untempered spirit—a spirit treacherous as cast iron under sudden shock.

We do not mean that one should feel contentment with the imperfect and avoid the compelling pressure of the ideal. We want the sense

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

of "our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee" which this invocatory prayer gives:

"Oh, Haunting Spirit of the Ever True,
Keep Thou the pressure of Thy way upon us.
We see a world too big to grasp;
We glimpse a city too far off to reach;
We trudge a way too long to walk;
We feel a truth too pure to understand.
We have a purpose that we cannot prove;
A life to live beyond the power of living;
A vision, time nor energy cannot contain;
But faith that all our effort will not be in vain.
Oh, Haunting Spirit of the Ever True,
Keep Thou the pressure of Thy way upon us."

We mean only that some things must come when they are ready, and to attempt to force them is as fatal as pressing in golf, to use an example in a sport where proper timing is essential. Some people lose the sense of God because they think too minutely and too desperately about Him. When I was a small boy with a radish garden I had to learn by bitter experience that radish seeds dug up to see how they are getting along, didn't. There are many ways in which this analogy does not apply, but one in which it does.

Do not forget, then, that the resolutions which come into the lives of men haunted by the

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

sense of God must, if they are to be truly creative, come as the result of their own necessary processes. Some things any one can do, but some of the knowledge of how to cure and power to bring salvation to a sick soul or a sinful world comes only by prayer and fasting, as Jesus said to His disciples when they were bewildered because the methods which they knew did not work as they had in the past.

Therefore:

Approach God, know thyself, set your mind fearlessly out into the light of truth, adventure with ideas, let yourself become haunted by the knowledge of good and evil, wait in expectancy for your beliefs to become structural convictions, and then your periods of conscious withdrawal into the Presence of God will become a transforming power.

But this power will become a sentimentalism or at least an inefficiency unless you can find some way to carry the vision of the cloister and the hearth into the clutter and heat of the world you live in. After all, no religion which cannot be made to live in the burning of the noontide heat and the burden of the day is worthy of our allegiance. How then, shall we link the "holy intention to do honor to God" with the practical pressures of the life of day by day?

CREATIVE SYMBOLISM

WE must find something to connect what we want to be with what we are. We realize that Dean Inge has stated well a fundamental truth when he says, "We are what we care about, and think upon, and love." Yet we do not always think upon what we love most to care about.

Let us carry our thoughts at once into the concrete. Here is a girl who is rapidly becoming a divided personality in which her good side is more and more absorbed in remorse over failure rather than in the joy of living. Her trouble is the necessity of presenting to her indulgent but, in certain areas, stern parent an accounting of how she spends her allowance. The allowance is ample; there is no question of receiving less if she does not spend it wisely; but there is ridicule over what seem, to the older generation, foolish expenditures. It all started almost unconsciously in the girl's mind with such reactions as, "I must have spent that money [the unaccounted for balance] for books—or dress goods," and the inevitable doctoring of accounts began. "That book cost a dollar

CREATIVE SYMBOLISM

and a half. I'll call it two fifty. . . . Those gloves, three. I'll call them four fifty." Now, she has two fifty to spend on movies, sodas, and so on, without recording it.

But she is beginning to loathe herself. Her difficulty is not that she does not know what is right; nor that she does not want to do what is right. The trouble is that what she really wants—a fearless honesty—is not a vivid enough desire at the time when she is making out her accounts. Her life is compartmentalized. She has accepted the law which society obeys and which the nature of flesh asserts, that religion and business do not mix, that ideals are other-worldly.

She would read such poignantly beautiful passages as this from Oxenham's *The Hidden Years*, where Jesus, who makes such easy yokes for oxen that many come to have Him fit their oxen too, is talking with a drover to whom He has just delivered a yoke. The drover, having expressed his satisfaction by saying:

"I'm right glad all my beasts will be happy now,' turns back as he remembers something. 'I was forgetting,' he said, 'I want a goad too.'

"I don't make goads and never will,' said Jesus.

"The drover stared at him. 'Why then? You can't drive oxen without the goad.'

CREATIVE SYMBOLISM

" 'Treat them properly and they'll need no goads.'

"The man looked at him, and then wagged his head and said, 'Your life hasn't lain among beasts, my lad—mine has,' and went on his way."

Watch the sentimentalism of our thoughts now.

It was natural for the girl to think: "How keen His insight; how true His judgment; how rude, and stupid, and blind, the drover. I'm glad I'm a Christian."

But she was not. She was a drover—as all of us.

Pacifists in peace time, "but when the blast of war blows in our ears . . ."

Professors of love, until class is ranged against class. . . .

We need not complete those sentences nor enlarge our illustrations. We separate this world from the next, eternity from time, idealism from reality, and wonder why we do not see God.

When you read *The Hidden Years* be sure to note that conversation between Jesus, the young school boy, and his school friends. They are talking about Nachor, the bully. Every school yard, and the other yards in which men gather all their lives, seems to have one. Jesus comments on the difficulty of loving every one.

CREATIVE SYMBOLISM

"'Give people love and they will love you. Give them scorn and hate and you get that back. . . . But,' he said after thinking it over, 'it's not always so. There are some one meets who seem to have no love in them, except for themselves. So they can't give any, and they are difficult to get on with. Nachor is like that now. He doesn't seem to care for any one except himself, and it is not easy to love him.'

"'I hate him,' I said, and I had good reason to, 'and so do all the others.'

"'That does no good either to him or you.'

"'But if you try to be nice to him he only thinks you're a fool and he's twice as nasty to you.'

"'Have you ever tried to be nice to him?'

"'N-n-no!' [very thoughtfully and slowly he says this] 'I don't know that I have.' "

This seems like a pure interpolation but it is set down here that you may have full sympathy with this girl, recognizing her problem as symbolic of your own. Life is so often easier in any particular moment when, with Peer Gynt, we can justify an unrighteous but profitable trade with the vanity of non-effective benevolence. Read that fourth act as an example of our rationalization of conduct.

He knew that his trade in Negro slaves for Carolina and idol images for China was, as he

CREATIVE SYMBOLISM

called it, "on the outer edge of the allowable." But he says that in such a big business as his he has to think of the thousands he employs who would be thrown out of work if his business was stopped. He goes on:

"What could I do? To stop the trade
With China was impossible.
A plan I hit on—opened straightway
A new trade with the self-same land.
I shipped off idols every spring,
Each autumn sent forth missionaries,
Supplying them with all they needed,
As stockings, Bibles, rum, and rice—"

Thus he balanced his misdeeds with his virtues, and feels himself no worse than other men.

All this is to keep us from any contempt of this girl, symbolic of us all, still bowed in remorseful prayer at a bedside as she broods over life that is so different in the daytime. Obviously her trouble, as ours too, is that she does not remember vividly. Let us help her to do it.

She wants to be honest and unafraid. We do not need to argue with her about that. She thinks straight, much straighter than Peer Gynt. But she needs more than to know; she must find power to do. We search for the symbol that will give her vivid recollection.

CREATIVE SYMBOLISM

We had been talking together of beauty and naturally quoted from the ninetieth Psalm:

"Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: establish Thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it."

Out of that familiar Psalm came the answer. *The established hand.* The beauty of the work of our hands. So rapidly that you cannot read it as fast as it happened, the symbol leaped to our eyes. A pen, a common desk pen, was the answer to her cry of need. There, at her desk where she made out her weekly accounts, it stood. Let the act of taking it in your hand remind you of the ninetieth Psalm's ending. Fill the act with content. Give to the pen meaning. You use the pen to do honest work at school, to write letters to your friends, to make out your accounts. As you reach for it, let it become your habit always, no matter what you are to do with it, to think, "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon me, and establish Thou the work of my hands."

Try to think that and put down two fifty when it was a dollar and a half! Either the thought must go or the account must be straight. As long as you really want to be honest, the pen filled with such content becomes the crea-

CREATIVE SYMBOLISM

tive symbol to give you, when you need it, the moment of vivid recollection.

From that single illustration, we can now go on to give many examples. The one we have just considered was an object. This type I have often used as "prescriptions," and know its value from its help to others rather than personally. My own symbols have been of other types: words; and physical acts or gestures. Let us look at them.

When I first knew, through the revelation of working out of an adolescent apartness from my earthly father, what Jesus meant when he said, "When ye pray, say, 'Our Father,'" I discovered a way to make the high desires of the spirit effective in the common experiences of the day. The phrase "Son of God," of which mention has already been made, became a symbol of meditation and of levels of understanding. It was, at times, a dogged holding on to a phrase which the spirit of evil had to exorcise from my mind if low thoughts or selfish acts were to have their way. At first, one could pretend not to see it there, but a vivid sense of one's self as a son of God interferes greatly with a self-centered life. It is interesting to see how persistent such a creative symbol can become. The very act of trying to forget it makes you remember it the more.

CREATIVE SYMBOLISM

That it must be kept constantly new, is evident. The adaptations of the phrase to current problems, both for personal use and for prescription for others, have been many.

Here is the great problem of busy city life: keeping personal the multitudinous contacts of which the telephone can be our example. Shrill, impolite in its manner of interrupting in the middle of a sentence; elbowing out the person with whom you are talking, with all the self-centeredness of a woman at a bargain sale; abrupt; and almost without exception asking for something, one gets bell-shock in the barrage of a modern city.

Let's grant its impoliteness and its importunity. Ask yourself why it rings. Usually it is because there is some need the ringer of the bell thinks you have power to fill. He or she may be wrong about your capacity; but the ringing of the bell is a cry of need.

As your spirit wilts under the pressure of time, more and more you like to think about the story of how Jesus took the finiteness of the flesh out into the wilderness and away from the multitudes to gain renewal of strength. "I cannot meet all the demands that come," you say; and you are right. But you remember also the woman of Samaria at the well, and the hand that touched Him in the crowd. What can you

CREATIVE SYMBOLISM

do to find that spring of power which Jesus drank from?

Let the telephone receiver become a symbol of vivid recollection. You, who claim sonship to God, and some one you recognize in the abstract as a child of God, are about to make contact. Think "Son of God" as your hand reaches for the phone. I did not say it would make life easier. I said it would make it more worth while.

Or take this for a "spiritual exercise." This is not to be done as a steady habit, month after month; or even weeks at a time. Try it some day, or better perhaps for a few days, to see where you are and where you are going.

Take out your watch once an hour and look at it for thirty seconds so that you know how long thirty seconds is, and then for a half minute more think, "I'm a son of God." You will have time, during that slowing up of activity, to doubt, "Was I?" and to cry, "Did I act like one?" You will find that the power of the haunted will come upon you.

While we could go on in almost infinite variations of ways of bringing that central idea of Christian revelation into man's daily life, we turn now to a third type of creative symbols.

We must not neglect the process which makes these symbols creative. It would be well to

CREATIVE SYMBOLISM

make the emphatic warning here, that a symbol must stand for something. This is one of the great difficulties with a faith based on ancient creeds: the words mean worse than nothing to a generation which has not made the ideas which the words represent, its own. If there is any question in your mind on that, turn now to the chapter on "The Distance to God." You may need that interpolated here before finishing up the techniques of creative symbolism.

Remember Goethe's great sentence: "What you have inherited from your fathers you must earn for yourself before you can call it yours." This applies even more to mind than it does to money.

This final example of creative symbolism is not new, of course. Years after I had been using this method in personal living and in suggestion to those who came for help, I ran across a similar example in Loyola's first Addition to his *Exercises*. He writes: "Each time one falls into that particular sin or defect, let him put his hand on his breast grieving for having fallen. Which can be done," he adds, "in the presence of many, without their perceiving what he is doing."

We are to think, then, of gestures as creative symbols to give to man, in his moment of need, vivid recollection.

CREATIVE SYMBOLISM

Begin with me, then, in the beginning. Before us we place the picture of Holman Hunt which is called "The Shadow of Death," but which I have renamed, "The Shadow of the Cross."

We see Jesus as a young man in the carpenter shop. No childhood picture is this, but that of a young man doing a full day's work. It is the end of the day. We know this because of two things: the sun is low, as the shadows show; and the workman's back and arms are tired, as is revealed by his natural way of stretching himself. Mary has come to call Jesus in to supper and has knelt to pick up some fallen shavings from the floor. Looking up, she sees against the crossed beams in the back of the shop, thrown by the light of the setting sun, the shadow of her son, arms outstretched, hanging on a cross.

Our meditation lays hold on us. The Shadow of the Cross! We think, "What does it mean?" We have in our minds a definition: "The cross is the unexpected, though not unconsidered, pain we suffer (often mental and physical but never those alone), in keeping true to the ideas which are foundational for life."

The Shadow of the Cross! The possibility of being torn between the ideas we hold and the world we live in are more and more evident

CREATIVE SYMBOLISM

to us the longer we dwell in the midst of the world's apartness from God.

The Shadow of the Cross! We walk constantly in that shadow. No man worthy of the profession of the faith of Christ but walks day by day with that shadow behind him. Behind him, that is, if he is walking toward the light of life which was in Christ. No one can tell when that shadow will become his momentary reality; when life will crush him back so that his shadow and his body are one.

What shall I do with my life in the presence of this shadow which has come to all men? No one yet has succeeded in the finiteness of flesh and time in overcoming the world.

"Save thyself!" the world cries. "Save wealth and health. Stand out of the light, for 'our God is a consuming fire.'"

But the "suffering servant" cannot. It was said of Him that "for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross." But it had to be "endured" even for Him. He considered Calvary, but when the shadow caught up with life in Gethsemane and made the seeming failure of a shameful death life's immediate reality, it was unexpected. How glad we are for Gethsemane! Jesus made life look so easy, ordinarily, that we are glad for those glimpses into the workshop of His spirit where some of the shavings lie

CREATIVE SYMBOLISM

about. We are so tried and tempted; we need to know that He was tempted too.

Our minds go on to think in poetry:

“And all through life I saw a cross,
Where sons of men yield up their breath.
There is no gain—except by loss,
There is no life—except by death,
There is no glory—but by bearing shame,
There is no justice—but by taking blame.”

We find ourselves with word prayers forming in our minds:

There is a fact in life, O God, and we try not to face it: That righteousness comes only through those who are willing to suffer for the right. That justice is restored by those who are willing to bear injustice. That peace comes to men through the restless, unsatisfied, hungry searchers for Thy Peace which passeth the understanding of common men.

We saw it lived in Christ, the particularization of the universal, the evidence in time of the eternal. Give us eyes to see that we, who profess ourselves His followers, must so live that through us, too, the unchanging truth of God shall be revealed.

God, all understanding, may the patience of great convictions, and of a great love, so dwell in us that we, too, shall see our highest hopes

CREATIVE SYMBOLISM

apparently unfulfilled, as He did, but, unafraid, shall be satisfied to try to live constantly more near to the best we know.

Our prayer stops the process of crystallization but the meditation goes on. Our thoughts run back through history, as we call the roll of the communion of saints who "through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, stopped the mouths of lions, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong." There in the past we see them, a great company of those who hold us in full survey.

Out ahead the searching spirit sees the saints today or those still unborn, the illumined souls of the world, who will today, or some day, make perfect these ideas which are the only constant the world has. We hear again the words of the prophets, the strain running through Old Testament and New, "There shall not enter in [to that beloved community] anything that defileth or maketh a lie." . . . "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all God's holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

In between the past and the future you stand. Open your left hand. Look at your fingers one by one. Name each finger for a man or a woman in the past who kept the faith. Close

CREATIVE SYMBOLISM

your fingers and lock them with the thumb to represent the eternal Christ.

Open your right hand. Name your fingers one by one with the great impossible obstacles of War, and Race, and Bread, and Power. Think of those who will some day solve these problems. Close your fingers in the grip of the eternal Christ.

Now let your arms be outstretched with the thought of holding on to past and future. The Shadow of the Cross! One is conscious, then, of aching muscles of the spirit. One sees why life pulled Him apart at thirty-three. One knows, with humbleness of heart, the weakness of the flesh—the weakness of the spirit, for that matter. An adaptation of several passages of *The Imitation of Christ* comes to one's lips:

"Most Mighty God, Thou zealous Lover of all
faithful souls,
Strengthen us with heavenly courage, lest the
miserable flesh,
Not as yet fully subject to the spirit,
Prevail, and get the upper hand.
Preserve us from becoming too much entangled
In the cares of this life,
The necessities of the body, or the pleasures of
the flesh,
Lest they prove to be an obstacle to the spirit

CREATIVE SYMBOLISM

And hinder our free drawing near
To offer, on the altar of our own hearts,
Ourselves, even body and soul,
Faithfully committing all that is within our
control
Unto Thee."

Into Gethsemane one goes and, if one holds
on, comes out, sometimes to be broken or some-
times, like the scientist who had a tryst with
truth and

" . . . Groped out,
Into that dark, that blind, that crooked street,
Called by the crowd Obscurity, . . ."

just find that we have apparently failed.

Yet this, at least, the vivid picture means, "I
am a part of truth."

Hours have gone, maybe years, in which the
thought of the Way of Life is mingled with
the picture of the Shadow of the Cross.

Now the symbol comes. *The clasped hands.*
Not in violence or in dramatic gesture but in
calmness and the "awful privacy" of the public
street where one can pray without "being seen
of men," the symbol is made.

Let me illustrate. I am a pacifist. There is
no way that I can see in which the Way of
Christ and the Practice of War can be recon-

CREATIVE SYMBOLISM

ciled. There are no illusions in my mind about a sure success for Peace. My mind tells me that the chances of immediate triumph of Christ's Way in international affairs, are slight. Call that pessimism if you will, at least it is honest and unafraid.

To choose Christ's Way, if His Way were certain, would still be right; but it would be easy. To make that choice today is hard, for there is no certainty of success.

No man of sense wants to fail. And in this is the shadow of failure.

No man of ideals but wants the perfect. And this is imperfect.

No man of authentic vision could rejoice in martyrdom, for martyrdom, which may be inevitable under certain circumstances, is an evidence of weakness. Our job is to succeed—to succeed in the perfect. Yet at every step one takes, the shadow of failure follows on.

Being a pacifist, I preached it from my pulpit and, having found a way at last through the experience of going up to Verdun an optimistic militarist and returning after ten months in the lines a confirmed and bewildered pessimistic agnostic, I proclaimed the old gospel of "peace on earth, goodwill toward men," with the new passion of conversion.

He came to me that next day, that proverbial

CREATIVE SYMBOLISM

big man of the official board, and said that if I ever preached such thoughts again he would see to it that I never gave another sermon from that pulpit.

Three things were possible.

I could have become a martyr. Bristling like a rooster I could have squawked, "No man is going to tell me what I shall speak or not speak from my pulpit," and would have alighted upon that portion of the anatomy usually reserved for listening rather than sitting.

Or I could have said, "Y-y-yes, Sir—I mean n-no-o, Sir," and asked God in my prayers that night to please forgive my weakness and make me strong for the next time.

I prayed then, though he never knew it.

It was not a conventional prayer of words. My lips were needed then to speak for God, not to talk to God.

It would have been ridiculous to have said, "Excuse me just a minute. I'll be right back," and withdrawn to a corner for a moment, there to fold my hands and close my eyes and with bowed head to say, "Please, O Lord, tell me what to do. I have a wife and a child and no money in the bank. My insurance is due next month. I am afraid. Give me strength. I don't know what to do. Give me knowledge. Help

CREATIVE SYMBOLISM

me, for Christ's sake." Obviously one could not do that.

My hands were behind my back and quietly my fingers closed. Into my self flowed wisdom and power. Hours and hours of thought about life and His Way were symbolized in that gesture of a second. I knew what to do. What I said is not important in this technique. Three weeks later the sermon was on war and peace again, but the big man, though always disagreeing, became a friend. How that was accomplished is not what we are considering. The point is that the creative symbol was there to give me consciousness of God's presence when I needed it.

"But," some people say, "that isn't prayer."

Why not? Does God pay attention only to movements of the lips and not to movements of the hands? Does He hear sounds only, or does the silence speak its message too?

The insight of Isaiah into the mind of God applies to every age until we learn our lesson. We change one word to make it apply to our practice.

"To what purpose is the multitude of your *words* unto Me? saith the Lord: when ye make many prayers, I will not hear. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings

CREATIVE SYMBOLISM

from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well."

A God, worthy of being called by Jesus, "Father," is not concerned with words except as the outward expression of an inward feeling.

THE LABORATORY NOTEBOOK

THE principle is now before you. This chapter adds nothing new. It is the record of adventures men and women have had in finding God in which creative symbolism has had a part. No one has right to use another's symbol until it has become one's own; but from these examples of how, out of the everyday, the vital spark has been caught, one may see one's own ways to be touched by a moment of vivid recollection whether the temptation is forty years in the wilderness, forty days in the desert, an hour in Gethsemane, or a moment on Calvary.

We give the matrix from which the creative symbols come, using first Studdert-Kennedy's poem, "Well?" If only you could have known him, that mite of a man. He was a mystic. He had his blind spots, of course, as we all have, which made men, whose blind spots were different from his, react violently against his powerful personality. He is dead, as we call it, now, and you can see him only through his books, of which his *Sorrows of God* is my favorite.

He pictures in this poem the cockney soldier sitting in the barracks after church parade dis-

THE LABORATORY NOTEBOOK

cussing the Chaplain's sermon. He had talked about that Judgment Day where the Angel Gabriel, who, with stenographic aid, had been recording each idle, mean word, and evil deed throughout your lifetime, would produce the record before the Great White Throne and make you answer for it all. This seems to the soldier "not what God would do." It was too negative for Him.

Then he tells his dream in which he seems to be standing alone on an ocean shore with its waves which

". . . got in my inside
And touched my memory"

and his whole life came back to him until he seemed full of the knowledge of all imperfection.

In that agony of soul he senses a figure standing behind him and turning looks into the eyes of One in whose eyes there came, in seemingly endless procession, the eyes of every one he has ever known. A flash of the poem reveals it poignantly:

"All eyes was in 'Is eyes—all eyes,
My wife's and a million more;
And once I thought as those two eyes
Were the eyes of the London whore.

THE LABORATORY NOTEBOOK

And they was sad,—my Gawd, 'ow sad,
Wiv tears what seemed to shine,
And quivering bright wi' the speech o' light
They said, ' 'Er soul was mine.' ”

In this setting there comes the word which is the title of the poem and the creative symbol of many people: “Well?” It should be said or thought with an upward tone. There is the meaning in it of “How about it? What next?” It is an inquiry. It should hang in the mind with the reverberation of a bell, “Well—?” and you cannot tell when the sound has stopped and silence has begun. The ending of the poem now comes:

“And then at last 'E said one word,
'E said just one word—‘Well?’
And then I said in a funny voice,
‘Please, Sir, can I go to 'Ell?’
And 'E stood there and looked at me,
And 'E kind o' seemed to grow,
Till 'E shone like the sun above my 'ead,
And then 'E answered, ‘No,
‘You can't, that 'Ell is for the blind,
‘And not for those that see.
‘You know that you 'ave earned it, lad,
‘So you must follow Me.
‘Follow Me on by the paths o' pain,
‘Seeking what you 'ave seen,

THE LABORATORY NOTEBOOK

'Until at last you can build the "Is"
'Wi' the brick o' the "Might 'ave been."'
That's what 'E said, as I'm alive,
And that there dream were true.
But what 'E meant,—I don't quite know,
Though I knows what I 'as to do.
I's got to follow what I's seen,
Till this old carcase dies;
For I daren't face in the land o' grace
The sorrow o' those eyes.
There ain't no throne, and there ain't no
books,
It's 'Im you've got to see,
It's 'Im, just 'Im, that is the Judge
Of blokes like you and me.
And, boys, I'd sooner frizzle up,
I' the flames of a burning 'Ell,
Than stand and look into 'Is face,
And 'ear 'Is voice say—"Well?"

It has been quite natural for many of those who have heard that poem read, to take the word "Well?" as their symbol. It is so expressive when given content by meditation, and understanding of the gaps between our profession and our practice. "I dress up in my Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes," said one girl, "and go up to First Church. I talk about the Brotherhood of man. But when I think that maybe a Negro

THE LABORATORY NOTEBOOK

will sit down at one of the tables I serve during the week, I grow cold. Then I begin thinking, Well? How about it? My saying the Lord's Prayer on Sunday in First Church must connect with my serving of tables on week days." When the first Negro did come to one of the tables where she was waiting, the symbol, "Well?" brought her into the Presence of God, and she served her brother man of black skin with a sense of exultation.

Here is a man out of work. He has read the story of Job. He knows that serving God for the good or the goods one gets for himself is not pure religion and undefiled. He has often said that religion is independent of prosperity and adversity. He may have quoted Job's summing up of his purity of motive in which Job says:

"I never relied on gold, nor rested everything on
solid gold,
I never rejoiced because my wealth was great,
because my hands had gathered riches;
I never looked on the shining sun nor on the
moon that moved in splendor,
Letting my heart go out to them, wafting a kiss
to them;
That also would have been a crime for punish-
ment,

THE LABORATORY NOTEBOOK

For I should thereby have denied the God on high."

But this man said all this while he was prosperous. Now adversity has come. You wonder what he will do now, and you find out that he has learned a secret. People watch the way he lives and see that his religion is real. He has been saying to himself, day after day, while he pounds the pavements to save nickels as he searches for a job, until, all too soon, the nickels are all gone too, and his hand goeth not to his mouth because his hand is empty, "Well—?"

You can see the almost endless adaptation of the symbol to all kinds and conditions of men. The notebook is full of words that men have tested. "Poise" is an unusual one I have known three people to use. "This Day," coming out of a meditation on the parable which ends, "This night thy soul is required of thee." "Be still" from the forty-sixth Psalm. "Established hands" from the ninety-first Psalm we have mentioned in full. The practice of the Presence of God through words of vivid recollection is boundless.

We make illustration of the physical symbols from the notebook of experience. Our matrix now is an old story, many times retold, about a skylark which flew, according to the legend,

THE LABORATORY NOTEBOOK

nearest to heaven of any of the birds and sang, from beyond men's sight, his haunting song. But one day as he started to his high place in the sky he noticed a curious little man driving a brightly colored cart along the road. Coming nearer he saw that the cart was filled with worms—luscious worms. The man was crying out a pedlar's song which defied translation.

"What are you singing?" the skylark asked.

"About my worms," the little man replied. "There are no finer ones for sale."

"Oh," thought the skylark to himself, "for sale, are they? I wonder how much they are? They do look good," and he asked the price.

"A feather per worm," he was told.

The skylark looked at his wings. He had so many feathers that one would not make any difference. He reached down with his beak and pulled at one. It hurt a little at first. He had never pulled one out before. Then suddenly it was out, and it didn't hurt, really.

He handed it over and received his worm. It was good.

He looked down at his wing but could not tell where the feather had come out. In fact, by noontime he could not even remember from which wing he had pulled it. He flew as high as before and sang his daily song.

Nobody needs to have me complete this part

THE LABORATORY NOTEBOOK

of the story. The time came, of course, when the skylark could not fly so high. His daily worm made his wings thin, and at last, one day, he realized that he could not lift his body from the ground.

In his distress he thought long and hard until a bright idea came. He busied himself all that day digging in the dirt and next morning when the little man drove by he had, beside the road, a great pile of worms.

"Little man," said the skylark, "I want my feathers back. Here are worms enough and to spare."

But the little man drove on, saying over his shoulder, "Worms for feathers is my business, not feathers for worms."

If any one, driven by one of the great enemies of God—remorse—were to get the idea that this analogy of the "time-arrow" of morality which moves never back, means that the good, the high life, is forever impossible for the waster of feathers, he would fall into one of the great errors of religion. The sensitive sinner is rarely as wicked as his morbid conscience imagines he is. Countee Cullen expresses that so keenly in his satirical quatrain on the self-consciously-wicked younger generation, "For an Unsuccessful Sinner":

THE LABORATORY NOTEBOOK

"I boasted my sins were sure to sink me
Out of all sound and sight of glory;
And the most I've won for all my pains
Is a century of purgatory."

Nevertheless, it is stupid not to realize that he who would sing his song had better dig his own worms if his feathers are the price of easy ones. Cyrano de Bergerac carried his symbolic feather in his hat, but I know a girl who has carried a crystal feather in her purse. Both feathers were creative symbols which brought a tested, tempted individual into the dwelling place of the Most High.

All things can speak to us of God. What we have been saying prosaically, Browning reveals in a flash of poetry:

"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees takes off his shoes."

A coil spring, a Six-Day-Bicycle-Race, the feel of a button in one's hand, fingers on the forehead, so many things can be the instant connection between oneself and God.

THE FEAR OF FREEDOM

AFTER having pounded away so strenuously on the techniques of prayer, it is wise to think again, not of how we are to pray, but what we are trying to do when we pray. We are trying to live without fear, in this or any world, conscious of the Presence of God. This cannot be done by methods alone for we are quite aware that no one has yet developed a formula which will eliminate fear. Perfect love is, of course, the expelling power, but so few find out what perfect love means for the this and that, the here and there. As in all great ideas, the formula, "Perfect love casteth out fear," only shifts the ground for search from "How can I get rid of fear?" to "How can I find out what is perfect love?"

It would be a tragic thing, therefore, and not the first tragedy in man's experience with prayer, to believe that in finding a method we had solved all difficulties. Such a cure would be as bad as the disease. Psychoanalysis has run into that danger. Like a man hitting himself on the thumb with a hammer in order to forget his toothache—and he accomplishes that purpose if

THE FEAR OF FREEDOM

he hits hard enough—or like the man in the Bible who had one familiar devil cast out only to have seven unfamiliar and more deadly devils come into the emptiness of his life, so we find ourselves with our patent medicine cures for fear. Even Christian Science, which has done so much to point the way toward the correction of certain evils in the perversion of Christ's spirit and teaching which the orthodox church fell into, has eliminated certain fears only to substitute other more deadly fears and above all that one fear, perhaps the most deadly of any, the fear of letting man be free to handle truth, unafraid that his fumbling and sometimes dirty hands can besmirch or ultimately destroy it.

My object has not been, therefore, to work out for you a little formula—take a spoonful in hot water before going to bed, and swallow one of these pills before and after meals. It is rather calmly to listen to some of the voices of fear which cry out to us in the silence of the night or above the confusion of the day.

One of the greatest reasons for our fears is that we have no distances in our lives. We grasp for the moment. That is why some homes are broken. Have you not seen them? Those who fear that they may not get all that is coming to them; that life may slip past. "Love seeketh not her own"; but fear is tense with

THE FEAR OF FREEDOM

panic and the thought of losing what one has.

Sometimes it is *pathetic*, as is a child of the tenements who has never known the colors of the country. I saw one once at a junction station, with a box tightly clutched in her hands.

"What have you there?" I asked.

"Flowers for Mother," she replied.

Flowers for mother! Picked by eager hands, put into a box tightly wrapped and tied, the hot train journey, back at last to a tenement room. "See, Mother!" Then—the opened box; the face fallen at the sight of the wilted stalks.

Like that we are, some of us. "I must have life," we cry and clutch with passionate fingers the flowers of the summer day.

More often it is *gruesome* as you watch the grossness of low desire ooze up around "the glory and the freshness of a dream" and suck it down into the mire of self-concern.

If you remember nothing else in all this book, remember this. The sentence we must write in the book of life is: THERE IS NO FEAR IN TRUTH—NO FEAR IN LOVE—NO FEAR IN GOD.

Here we find a part, at least, of the startling courage of God. In the moral nature of the universe the choice had to be made between freedom and authority; and in that revealing parable which underlies all we have been think-

THE FEAR OF FREEDOM

ing, Jesus tried to make men realize the choice that God had made.

It was a choice that man be free even from God. Browning says it for us:

"In youth I looked to these very skies,
And probing their immensities,
I found God there, His visible power;
Yet felt in my heart, amid all its sense
Of that power, an equal evidence
That His love, there too, was the nobler dower.
For the loving worm within its clod,
Were diviner than a loveless god.
You know what I mean: God's all, man's
nought:

But also, God, whose pleasure brought
Man into being, stands away
As it were, an handbreadth off, to give
Room for the newly-made to live,
And look at Him from a place apart,
And use His gifts of brain and heart,
Given, indeed, but to keep for ever.
Who speaks of man, then, must not sever
Man's very elements from man,
Saying, 'But all is God's.'
Man stands on his own stock
Of love and power as a pin-point rock,
And looks to God who ordained divorce
Of the rock from His boundless continent."

THE FEAR OF FREEDOM

We base our thought of man in relationship with God on this: *Freedom is a fact.* We speak not of philosophic roots or psychological sources. We do not argue about it. We admit our practical limitations. But we do assert a conviction that the ultimate decision of life's direction is not forced by God. We see the breakdown of all morals unless this fact is recognized. Whatever the causes, and however you may deplore it, the old controls morality once depended on are gone. Chaperon your children as you like, but don't fool yourself into thinking that they cannot get out from under your control if they want to.

To have a society of individuals controlled from within has always been an ideal. Today it is rapidly becoming a necessity. The reasons behind that statement are obvious as we view the world in which we live. If you say that we have not such controlled individuals in our freer world of common actions, I'll grant it. Only the way is not back to the old system. That is doomed.

We shall see the breakdown of all government until this fact is recognized. Spinoza says it so well in his definition of the ideal purpose and practice of the state: "The end of the state is not to dominate men, nor to restrain them by fear; rather it is to free each man from fear that

THE FEAR OF FREEDOM

he may live and act with full security and without injury to himself or his neighbor." We must recognize freedom as a fact.

The second outstanding fact in the situation is that *Freedom is a fundamental principle*, much like Love. People give it lip service—as they do to Love—and fear its practical application to any specific situation. Like peace, it is always after the *next* war. Like adventure, it is always for the next chance. Like the Kingdom of God, to use an old expression as a symbol of a different kind of a world, it is always the job of the next generation.

Yet with all that true, people do admit that it is a principle. To be sure while they do say, "I believe in it," they so often add, "But it won't work in this case." When you come to think of it, that is a pretty common definition of a principle, anyway. They must some day, however, come to realize that freedom is not only a principle in this far-away sense; but that it is the only sure method of ever attaining the goal of sonship to God.

Look well, then, at Jesus' picture of God. The story, misnamed because of man's centering of attention upon the character like unto himself, and thus called by men the Parable of the Prodigal Son, is only incidentally about the Prodigal. Jesus was telling about God. "What is God

THE FEAR OF FREEDOM

like?" people had been asking Him. "Like this," Jesus said, "A certain man had two sons," and then He went on with a parable of Freedom. It is not a parable about prodigalling. It is a parable about a love so big that it will let you go if you will not stay of yourself. Men dare not believe that.

That is man's Fear of Freedom. "As a principle, Freedom is fine," they say, "but in this particular situation it might not work, and so I do not dare take a chance."

It was not an easy idea for men to accept, that conception of love which Jesus gives us; and a big part of which is the fact, and the principle, and the method of freedom. It included whoever would. There was Judas, who talked behind His back; was a friend to His face but a traitor to both life and work. Jesus knew that, but He gave him the Last Supper with the rest. His love stood whatever people did, and understood even their misunderstandings. "Nothing can separate us from the love of God which we see in Him," Paul wrote afterwards. Neither death, nor life, high things or lowly things, the immediate and often more difficult to bear present, or the uncertain future. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Jesus, the Christ.

Some people cannot get that. "I suppose you

THE FEAR OF FREEDOM

will not have anything more to do with me after I tell you this," is an expression common to the minds and lips of the distraught. "I don't dare tell you, it would destroy our friendship," is another.

Love is so big that it does not matter what you do, you cannot get beyond its circle. That was the freedom Jesus proclaimed. Nothing too bad to cause rejection; no limit to forgiveness. Stay in the far country forever, but you cannot get away from the bigness of that fearless free love.

But men say, "Man with such freedom will destroy himself." It is possible. We are not betting on a sure thing. We are making ventures for eternal life without the absolute certainty of success. The prodigal might never have returned. Some of them do die in the far country. But we do realize this fact which a schoolmaster, getting ready to retire soon, said to me the other day in conversation: "A man's center of gravity must be in himself."

You remember from your high-school physics what a center of gravity is. The line from the center of balance falling toward the center of attraction must come within the base or the object falls. How vividly that says something about the world of the spirit! Life is worth

THE FEAR OF FREEDOM

nothing if it is a matter of props. The only life worth living is one free to destroy itself which chooses not to do so.

A group of men recently were discussing birth control. Again and again this fear of freedom came in. "I believe in it, but I am afraid to have the knowledge of it general," would be a good composite sentence of their attitude as well as an indication of their naïveté. Man is afraid of man. He props him and bolsters him about. But man's center of gravity must be in himself.

I know that life's bases sometimes get worn so thin that the slightest breath throws the center of balance outside the base, and the man falls. As a practical observer of mankind, I am not forgetful of that fact. Only we do not cure by fear, and we eventually make it impossible for a man to walk alone if we keep his legs in plaster casts, or refuse to allow him to walk without a crutch.

The principle is admitted. If all mankind needs is the opportunity to destroy himself, then let him do it. Life is worth nothing if it can be preserved only by external compulsion. Religion that founds itself upon fear as its control and its authority is a self-defeating philosophy of life. Man must be free to love or to reject love.

THE FEAR OF FREEDOM

A love compelled is a tyranny, be it of God or of man. But freedom is the possibility of the divine. Believing it, we must find out how to give it expression, for it is only when you see it lived that you know it to be true.

I BELIEVE IN GOD

A GROUP of ministers was gathered in a club-room discussing religion. The wide variety of religious ideas was noted by all, and, by some of them, with concern. At last one man broke out with this remark, "Well, at least we can all join together in one statement: 'I believe in God.'" I looked out over that group of men and my heart was suddenly sick within me.

There, was a man whose God was still the tribal God of the chosen people. The prayers from his pulpit during the war were imprecatory Psalms—none quite so bad as a famous prayer to the Senate which ended "God damn the Germans," but though in better taste, were still of the same spirit. His God was an Anglo-Saxon, America-for-the-Americans, God.

Here, was a priest of the great God, Prosperity. God gives good things, by which he meant houses, and clothes, and motor cars, to his righteous church members. His was a religion of success. His tests of God were as the friends of Job.

This one preached the fear of an angry God kept from punishing man only by the interven-

I BELIEVE IN GOD

tion of the crucified Christ, the world doomed in the wrath of God until Christ's second coming.

That one used God as an errand boy, or perhaps a better picture would be, as a district leader; a source of favors and special protection whose hold on man was as powerful as a Tammany Hall politician's over a voter.

"I believe in God!" Could he have said anything on which there would have been as much difference as upon that! Lonely in the sense of an inexpressible separation in understanding as I looked about that group of men, almost smirking in their agreement, I saw one hungry, searching pair of eyes; was held by them; knew, as he knew, that there was one other there whose ideas about God were not clothed in set words but who felt the hurt and the sense of being haunted with the awful light of truth to be sought and always to be sought again. A God not to be defined but to be felt—to be known not as a mathematician knows two and two to be four, but as a musician knows two and two to be four. Not as a logician knows love to be the conqueror of hate, but as a poet knows it.

"What a difference it makes what men believe about God," I thought. The God of so many men is a God of fear and favor and patron-

I BELIEVE IN GOD

age; a God of caprice to whom they go about their aches and pains.

It is well for us, then, not to forget to talk of God before we are too deeply immersed in the methods of our contact with Him. To do more than to try to get a glimpse of what He means as a power in life is obviously impossible. This is not to be an essay upon whatever gods there be, nor will it trace the idea of God all the way from Animism to the Absolute. It's an attempt to see the power that comes into a person's life when God becomes an experience.

That some experience of God is universal is portrayed quite unconsciously by a village atheist pictured in *Life*, who was hectored by the pious people of the town on his state of unregenerate unbelief and who finally broke out with this interesting declaration: "I believe in nothing, in nothing, thank God."

A sense of God is fundamental in man's experience. The reason why so many of us at times feel that we do not believe in God is because our conception of Him is static. Most atheists are merely disbelievers in certain ideas about God; or, as I have expressed it in public speech and in general conversation: "An atheist is a man who is protesting against the kind of God that our lives reveal."

They do not like to have you say that, any

I BELIEVE IN GOD

more than our Columbus Circle atheists enjoyed being called, by the court, a religious meeting; but it is in most cases true. It makes such a difference what one believes about God that often the only escape from an impossible conception—impossible intellectually, impossible ethically—is to deny the existence of God at all.

Do you remember James Thomson looking out on the impossibly awful world of poverty, and war, and sickness, and sin, and crying in his bitterness:

“Not for all Thy power, furl'd or unfurl'd,
For all Thy temples to Thy glory built,
Would I assume the ignominious guilt
Of having made such men in such a world.”

To believe in God, and the kind of God one does believe in, makes life different. Let us begin with an inquiry into the attitudes of man's search for God.

Not to find God is bad enough, but to find Him is worse. And so we often compromise by searching diligently for Him in places where he is not. We gain the satisfaction of being occupied in a search, without the obligation and responsibility of constructing a portion of the Kingdom of God on earth on whatever frontier we happen to be.

We are tramps in the spiritual world, eating,

I BELIEVE IN GOD

but not working unless we have to. I have forgotten who said it but it is true, that we would be equally shocked at hearing our religion doubted, or seeing it practiced. This whole statement is blunt. It may not be true about you. No man can say about any other man what his search is. Even he does not always know at first; but he is the final judge of his own sincerity. You must answer to yourself whether it is true.

Do you want to find God? That is a serious question. Because if you do find Him it will make a change in your life. He is not a cloak of righteousness to be put on or off at convenient seasons. He is an all-pervading inner passion, a driving force. If you really find God you will know it. He will lead you through trials and tribulations as well as by still waters and green pastures. As the writer of Hebrews says, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

If you find God you will lose from your life things which you do not want to lose. I never saw a man who seemed God-filled who had an easy life, from the standpoint of a world seeking comfort. History does not show one. You get a sense of urgency, a disregard of personal comfort as a marking characteristic of those whom

I BELIEVE IN GOD

time has stamped as the God-illuminated of the world.

There will be some things you will have to stop. And you don't want to stop them. It will be no hardship when you find God, but it seems a hardship now, and you have a Fear of the Lord. Augustine, seeing what was happening to him in his search for God, seeing how inevitable was the change in his life, held on to the pleasures of the un-God-like of the world for a season in that prayer for which we all have great sympathy: "O Lord, make me good, but not now."

Moreover, finding God—at least, the God Whom Christ revealed—cuts across some of these so-called laws of nature, laws agreeable and reasonable. "Self-preservation is the first law of life"; and in all the relationships of the world we work it out. But when through the eyes of Jesus we have seen God, self-preservation becomes an instinct of animals, not a law of human beings with the spark of the divine. And feeling our responsibility to a God-filled world, we lose adherence to the laws which seemed so right.

The search for God will make you lose things dear to you.

Then finding God will not make you happy. I mean in that temporary happiness of the mo-

I BELIEVE IN GOD

ment. There will be a deep underlying happiness, of course, but we are so cloaked, until we have found God, in the surfaces of happiness.

What comfort is it to search for God if the reality of our living must be so far from our vision? It seems so impractical, this business of Christianity. We are conscious only of a yawning chasm between ourselves and our ideals. Isaiah, when he saw the Lord, cried out, "Woe is me! I am undone; I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen God." The poet has expressed this feeling of a great gulf fixed between men's knowledge of the every day and his vision of the ideal as he says sadly:

"Only in dreams is a ladder thrown

From the weary earth to the sapphire walls;
But the dream departs and the vision falls,
And the sleeper awakes on a pillow of stone."

Yes, it's true. We know it so often. A pillow of stone! This is the immediate result of our vision of God. The contrast between the cities of men and the city of our God is so tremendous that it makes us tremble sometimes just to say the word—God. And we would almost give our souls sometimes to be blind again. Knowledge changes men and women.

It is in *Poems of the Unknown Way* that we

I BELIEVE IN GOD

see the inexorable difference that a finding of God demands:

"If Love should count you worthy, and should
deign

One day to seek your door and be your guest,
Pause! ere you draw the bolt and bid him
rest,

If in your old content you would remain.

For not alone he enters: in his train

Come children of the mists. The lonely
guest,

Dreams of the unfulfilled, and unpossessed,
And sorrow, and Life's immemorial pain.

"He wakes desires you never may forget,

He shows you stars you never saw before,

He makes you share with him, for evermore,

The burden of the world's divine regret.

How wise you were to open not!—and yet,

How poor if you should turn him from the
door."

There are two facets in the imagery of that poem that it would be valuable for us to look at. These two ideas are fundamental to this concept of prayer which we are developing.
God is Law:

It is beginning to be evident to all intelligent people that we do not live in a world of caprice.

I BELIEVE IN GOD

We are living in a world of law—laws unbreakable and always operative. And in this world of law, God is present not in opposition to, but in accordance with, these laws.

As the truth of this begins to dawn upon us a new light comes into the world. For the first time we are conscious that now we have a God in Whom we can trust. We did not have Him before. He was a God to be placated; to be bribed and wheedled into doing our will. Now we have the growing conviction that God is trustworthy. And it makes a different world. It gives a power to live according to truth and righteousness which was absent in the God of caprice. With a God Who changes His mind, Who says one thing today and does another tomorrow, we, unconsciously perhaps, are in the attitude of a child toward an indulgent teacher or a moody father. We take a chance of getting off from our sins of omission and commission because God may be feeling in good spirits when our Judgment Day comes. But when we get the idea of a God of moral integrity, the same yesterday, today, and forever, that happy chance departs.

Let me illustrate first from the laws of the material world. My little girl stepped on a rubber ball one summer and fell in such a way that her leg was caught between its own ability

I BELIEVE IN GOD

to stand a strain and the force of gravity. Which shall give way? By what right should I dare to ask God to lay aside, momentarily, the force of gravity so that she may fall to the ground gently, without hurting herself?

With a God of caprice—every right. I have attended church, said my prayers, brought my offering and gone into the courts of the Lord. I am in good standing with God.

Furthermore, the child is innocent and should not be made to suffer. Therefore, God ought to lay aside the law of gravity momentarily for her. It is such a little thing for Him to do. So I argue to a God of Caprice.

But look at the consequences. The power of gravity holds the stars in their courses; it makes possible that man shall walk; that rain shall fall; that mountains stand; that rivers run to the sea. By its power thousands of mill wheels turn. Trusting in its steady force surgeons can do the most delicate of operations, their hands held in balance by that power they trust.

Why go on? You see the point. Do you remember that sensational story, *The Man Who Rocked the World*? In order to show his power this being stopped the rotation of the earth for a moment of time and tremendous catastrophies resulted. A world built on the basis of the fact of the steady power of that

I BELIEVE IN GOD

rotation, had it taken away for the moment. Tall buildings crumbled. People could no longer stand. Chaos resulted.

Suppose God on that instant that my child fell had stopped the force of gravity for a moment. A surgeon at work on a delicate operation would have felt his hand suddenly jerk violently in one direction or the other. As when a man jumps from a moving car and is unbalanced by the interruption in the steady forward force, so countless catastrophies might result.

Yes, I know, God could be conceived of at a great instrument board adjusting, balancing, playing upon the laws of nature to cause rain to fall on the unjust and not on the just. To interrupt the force of gravity for my child and keep the rest of the world in balance, is not beyond the conception of His power. But it makes the life of man a puppet show. This paragraph is an interpolation in my thought to meet the objection which always comes from some one at that point.

No, you see it is impossible. I cannot ask God to interfere in that force of gravity. I am supremely selfish if I would request such a favor, and He would be immoral to grant it. One time in a million, a billion, we know not how many times, the force of gravity breaks a leg

I BELIEVE IN GOD

for one individual while all the other times it brings benefit to the world.

A theologian of brilliant mind—a mind that was keen and almost cold, it seemed—had a beautiful wife who became sick and died. I shall not go into the necessity for bacteria as a saving force in the world. That they are necessary and beneficial is, of course, a known fact. In this case, of course, it seemed to us a destructive thing. Joy and beauty went out by the operation of the laws of bacterial life.

We who knew him wondered how his cold, keen, theological faith would meet that specific incident. And one day as he lectured on the theological concept of Providence, with a little catch in his voice, he said that we can understand some deaths, but from the standpoint of human love an untimely death seems too great an evil to stand. But he went on: "The untimely going of those 'whom we have loved long since and lost awhile' is not too heavy a price to pay for an orderly and dependable universe."

It is difficult always when the breaking power of this dependable world affects the individual. We have not attained, nor would we want to, the indifference of Epictetus, the Stoic slave, who watched the operation of the laws of stress and strain in the world with complete detach-

I BELIEVE IN GOD

ment even when his own leg was the object of the strain. His master, so the story goes, was twisting his leg one day to try to break his Stoic calm. "You will break my leg if you keep on," the slave said gently to his master. The man continued to turn the leg and the laws of nature worked to do what the slave had said. The leg snapped and Epictetus added with a smile, "I told you so." While this is not an ideal to strive for it would be well for us to realize the confidence that comes from living in a world of law instead of fearful caprice.

Now, if we maintain that this reign of law holds also in the realm of spiritual realities, it gives us a tremendous power by which to live. But at the same time it faces us with changes in our ways of thinking about, and our relationship with, God.

Let us make it very concrete again by considering examples of how the principle of the trustworthy God works out in the practice of prayers for the sick. This is where I find myself in greatest difficulty with those whose ideas and habits of prayer are opposed to the thesis of this book.

I do not ask God to make people well. Neither by word nor by the unexpressed attitude within do I pray God that the desperately sick be restored to health.

I BELIEVE IN GOD

It is proper for me to say several personal things before going further so that you will not think this is an inexperienced or untempered idea. Twice I have stood outside the door of the one for whom I have such love that all other love for individuals including my love for my child could be lost within its magnitude, and have seen the doctor shake his head. Back into that room I went and neither time did the pressure of the particular even suggest an exception to the principle.

After all, principles are of no value if they do not apply when they affect the intimate circles of our own concern. If even the temptation had come to pray God for her life, the certainty of the conviction could be questioned. But the temptation was not there. We had to fight against no fearful feeling. There was an absence of fear so that if there had been any pressure to forsake the principle it was so far within the tensile strength of our attitude that we felt no strain. We were far beyond asking Him to cure her, in our relationship with God.

The second background of experience in this area is that there have been two very definite occurrences of what the doctors call miracles in the recovery of desperately sick people with whom, in the natural course of pastoral relationship, I have had contact. The earlier epi-

I BELIEVE IN GOD

sode, which has already been referred to as the miracle of the twins, for the reason that it contains greater emotional handicaps, is made the illustration in spite of the fact that the more recent experience has a dramatic quality in it that is almost overpowering. Let us look at the miracle of the twins, which was not a miracle at all in the popular sense that it was contrary to nature.

The shrill note of the telephone caught me in the midst of many duties, to tell me that the Jones twins were sick—desperately sick. The parents wanted me.

Fortunately, I made connection with the doctor before starting out. One likes to know what one is up against. "Not a chance for Wally" (we'll call him), and "perhaps a thread of a chance for Bill. Some queer kind of infection, it is, and all the composition of the body liquids in their chemical proportions are being upset." That was the general idea and, whether technically correct or not, did get across the particular idea that it was very serious. "Thank you, doctor."

To the house, my car sped. Have you ever felt fear to be present without seeing the person who was afraid? I could tell what I was up against as soon as I stepped into the house. The room was full of fear.

I BELIEVE IN GOD

Then the mother and the father came in. Frantically they clutched me. "Come and pray for our boys." How easy to have said some pious words! How simple to have put soft putty into the cracks of their fears and let the foundations alone! But that would have been acting a lie.

I said, "Do you know what the doctor thinks?" and told them. No chance at all for Wally! a thread of a chance for Bill! They were stilled by the definiteness of it. "That does not mean that there is no hope," I pointed out, "but that is the margin that science gives as far as science can see."

"You are asking me to pray to God for the life of your boys," I went on.

"Let me ask you, what do you really believe about God?"

"How cruel!" I have had people say when this story has been told. "What a time to ask such a question!"

Did it ever need a clearer answer than then? It should have been answered long ago. My sin and theirs that we had not faced it before. But with their fear so poisonous in the very air we breathed, how necessary it was to face it then.

To set down on paper the next half hour would be impossible, but the result was evident:

I BELIEVE IN GOD

two calm and confident people went with their minister into the sickroom of those boys and the words we used about "the valley of the shadow" had real meaning because they had faced and exorcised their fear.

Both boys got well.

That is not essential to the principle. This is not an exposition of a method by which men are healed of their diseases. It is an interesting and important fact that the absence of fear is the hope of a disease-racked body; and more people would not need to die, if our lives were not so frantic under pressure.

I am perfectly willing to grant, too, that many times the saying of prayers for the sick gives such comfort to some souls that their anxious spirits are at rest and they have their chance to get well.

The point that we are talking about is that God does not wait for you or me to ask Him before He is willing to allow a sick person to recover. If God were holding back until they could locate their minister (who might have slipped off to the ball game) to ask him to work the time for a call into a busy schedule; if God had waited until that minister had found time to go to the house where the sick boys lay and there at the bedside tell Him that we wanted

I BELIEVE IN GOD

Him to make the children well, and would He please grant our request; if God had to be asked before He would grant them that special favor which was, according to such a conception, within His power and His practice in such matters, then God would be a devil unworthy of man's adoration.

This is one of the things that He knoweth we have need of. Our part is not to deny our faith by the frantic pleas of our fear.

This is not saying that there are not "more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy." We are only pointing to that higher level of understanding of God in which there comes such realization of the constant Presence of a trustworthy God that there is no need to fear.

This beautiful prayer in poetry from A. C. Benson reveals the note of panic which comes so naturally in sudden sorrow or overpowering danger and that fearless poise which the searching soul may find:

"My sorrow had pierced me through; it throbbed
in my heart like a thorn;

This way and that I stared, as a bird with a
broken limb

Hearing the hound's strong feet thrust im-
minent through the corn,

I BELIEVE IN GOD

So to my God I turned; and I had forgotten Him.

"Into the night I breathed a prayer like a soaring fire;—

So to the windswept cliff the resonant rocket streams,—

And it struck its mark, I know; for I felt my flying desire

Strain, like a rope drawn home, and catch in the land of dreams.

"What was the answer? This—the horrible depth of night,

And deeper, as ever I peer, the huge cliff's mountainous shade,

While the frail boat cracks and grinds, and never a star in sight,

And the seething waves smite fiercer;—and yet I am not afraid."

When one has come to this knowledge of God, one has ascended another level of understanding. This is a process of experience, rather than of logical proofs, and we want now to turn to that.

THE DISTANCE TO GOD

PEOPLE are always asking me to prove God. I cannot. Nobody can. Before I was scarcely off the train which brought me to a young people's conference the other day, a group of young people were around me with this question. "How can we be sure that God is, and that it is really worth while to bother about trying to make a decent world? How can we be sure?"

"How can we be sure," an older voice here in the big city was asking this question, "that there is anything beyond death? If only I could know, I think I could live in a better way."

So the questions come. "Prove religion is true, and I'll live it."

There is only one thing I can say now to such questions. I hope some day we may find some expression of all this which will help everybody. But this helps some, and I give it to you as the best that I now know. But, first, a word or two about this matter of proof.

Proof is the *bête noir*, the dread bogey man, of both science and religion. It was said recently about one man of this new school of thought which comes at its philosophy from

THE DISTANCE TO GOD

the standpoint of mathematics and physics: "He is either a fool or the greatest philosopher of our day, and only the next generation will know which."

The little man, the retailer of science, will take only what he can see. The creator (the revealer, perhaps, is a more accurate word for such) of science must take little that he can see lest it blind him to the unseen. That is quite obvious as we look at the history of science.

It is likewise true of religion. There is that eternal struggle between two needs: On the one hand, we find the desire of man to be sure; to have a religion fixed, unchangeable, which says with authority, use only nationally advertised brands of soul food, guaranteed under the pure religion and undefiled acts, ask for the right label and accept no substitutes; a religion of fixed creeds and unchanging doctrines. On the other hand, there is a longing for reality, aided and abetted by a sense of humor, which realizes that the infinite is too big for verbal concepts, and eternal truth immeasurable by man's mind.

In religion as in science, therefore, we see that the heretics, who have the unprovable in their hearts, are the discoverers of the next generation's orthodoxies. I wanted to say that much about the impossibilities of proof before giving the only answer I know to those who are trying

THE DISTANCE TO GOD

to see God and all that He implies for our world.

The answer is this. We come to truth, we believe in God, we know the world has sense, not by proof of the goal whereto we travel, but by the levels of understanding that come to us as we walk the way of our great conjectures.

One cannot become specific about this. That is evident. We must speak in parables. The experience of God is like unto that of a man leading a group of boys to the top of Mt. Washington. They got down from the train on the other side of Mt. Madison, which was as far as that organized knowledge of man could take them. With packs on their backs they followed a blazed trail up that mountain until, at its top, they stood on a new level. Below them they could see a valley, the smoke of a train, the checkerboard of the farms with its vari-colored greens of different crops, the red barns and white houses. All that, they knew. They looked out and up but they could see only the mist of clouds.

"Where is Mt. Washington?" they asked a man who came toiling up the trail out of the Great Gulf below.

He turned and pointed up into the mist.

"There," was the reply, but no one of them could see it.

THE DISTANCE TO GOD

"How do you know?" they asked the man who showed the way.

"Because I have been there," he replied, but he could not prove it.

Down the side of Madison they went, around the shoulder of Adams and over the rock slide which many years before had wiped out the old trail. Down, down, down they went until they stood in the Great Gulf between the mountains they knew, and Washington, which they did not know. All the while the mist grew denser until at last it descended as a shroud, enveloping them. For thirty-seven hours they lived in mist, unable to see beyond their hands extended. They kept wet wood burning by constantly waving tin plates before their smoking fire. They halved their rations as supplies ran low. Beside them ran a stream, going down away from their goal. But they had the longing for the mountain top in their hearts.

The leader thought of his responsibilities. The young lives depended on him. He was leading them to a mountain he had never seen. He believed in Mt. Washington because he believed the men who said they had been there. But he could not prove it any more than they.

The mist began to lift one morning and under pack they followed it up, lost in it sometimes,

THE DISTANCE TO GOD

worn by the steep trail and its obstacles. Below, new visions spread before them. Above there was only mist, except once when for one moment, as they stood on a ledge resting, the mist lifted suddenly, and they saw up there the mountain's peak. The mist came down again, but now they knew and with new vigor pushed on until at last they stood on the top. And ever and anon, as the wind blew the clouds aside, they could see wide horizons, and they were glad, because the world seemed larger, and they had memories they could not forget.

Do you know this poem?

"I am a wanderer.

I remember well one journey,
How I thought the way was missed
So long the city I desired to see lay hid.
When suddenly its spires afar
Gleamed through the encircling clouds.
You can conceive my transport.
Soon the vapors closed again,
But I had seen the city,
And one such glimpse no darkness can obscure.
May God deny you peace and give you glory."

That is what I mean. God is a glimpse—not a formula.

How do I know?

Because the world went to smash; and all was

THE DISTANCE TO GOD

dark; and God—the immanent and transcendent; the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent—became an empty shell, the husk only of reality.

How do I know?

Because the world was rotten. It turned sick my soul. I could not breathe.

How do I know?

Because I lived on a level of understanding and seeing a hill on the horizon I climbed to it and saw new levels and lived there.

How do I know?

Because in the anguish of the much more of evil I now see, there is the assurance that, as I live the best I know in the immediate present, new values of the ultimate come.

No one can prove that life has sense, that God is, that the immediate has any ultimate. You cannot prove it to any one who will not try to live in the new light of understanding. When people come to you for proof you have to speak to them in poetry and symbols, in pictures of vivid inspiration. You must have the patience of knowledge, with their impatience.

And so you must ask them what they want you to prove of God. That He is good to them perhaps? He won't be, necessarily. Christ died, you know, upon a cross; and He was good and did not deserve to die like that. Read to them

THE DISTANCE TO GOD

Countee Cullen's poem on the appeal of Christ to black men. I hope you know it. He calls it "Simon, the Cyrenian":

"He never spoke a word to me,
And yet He called my name;
He never gave a sign to me,
And yet I knew and came.

"At first I said, 'I will not bear
His cross upon my back;
They only seek to place it there
Because my skin is black.'

"But he was dying for a dream,
And He was very meek,
And in His eyes there shone a gleam
Men journey far to seek.

"It was Himself my pity bought;
I did for Christ alone
What all of Rome could not have wrought
With bruise of lash or stone."

Sometimes you will get very much discouraged because people want to go so fast and want to know all about God all at once, and are mad because they do not, and then they say He isn't. And you must try to make them see that they must travel the *distance to God* themselves. Some go faster than others because they see

THE DISTANCE TO GOD

more, and judge better, and have clearer maps, perhaps. But all must go the distance.

The top of Mt. Washington may not have quite the same meaning for those who have gone up on the cog-railroad from the luxurious Mt. Washington House at Bretton Woods. I shall never forget the woman who alighted from the train atop of Washington with the mountains of five States spread before her and stopping me asked, "Where do you go to see the view?"

I suspect many people never see the glory of God because their only way to Him is up the safe cogs of inherited and mechanical creeds.

Even there, however, it depends so much on the attitude. I once knew a boy who went up the cog-road into Chamonix at the foot of Mt. Blanc one day—out from the hell of war and its dirt, to the quiet, clean mountain—he never did understand how his fellow travelers could play cards without lifting up their eyes unto the hills.

But after all the important thing is not *how* you reached the heights but whether you know you are there and what you see from where you are. There is something about life and God that defies description, but it is known as you live on ascending levels of understanding.

I am afraid for you when you feel you must prove God before you live His way. You cannot. You must move by the levels of under-

THE DISTANCE TO GOD

standing which you have to the sense of the unprovable.

We are in a mood now when we can say something which, if taken literally, has no meaning for me. Out of one's own sense of loneliness, when it seems sometimes as if you could almost kill yourself because nobody understood you, there comes the thought of the loneliness of God.

The chaotic world makes you ache, sometimes, with its beauty and its pain; and the longing to be, and do, and think welling up within you. If only people would understand, you cry; but they don't understand you any more, perhaps, than you understand them. Do you know what I mean? Well,—

Does not God feel that way too? Lonely. Why not? "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," saith the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth,"—than the earth. Man looking downward, grubbing in the dirt for self.—And God lonely.

Middleton-Murry in that quite unorthodox book, *Jesus, Man of Genius*, gives us the picture of God as a Being longing for companionship. His picture is vivid and dramatic. A lonely creature waiting behind heavy curtains at the end of a long corridor for man to approach that

THE DISTANCE TO GOD

God may speak to him. Through the generations He longs for man to come, and down the corridors He hears their footsteps echo, but men become frightened or led astray and do not come near. I quote: "All through the long history of Israel had He waited. The lonely God had heard their footsteps down the dread corridors as they came near, some so near that His longing heart would burst to speak a word, but none had passed the veil and word had not been spoken."

I would not leave that sole impression with you, beautiful as it is. You get the idea from it of a God in a place apart. But if our experience means anything, the greatest loneliness comes not in a place apart, but in a *spirit* apart. When you walk the streets of the everyday, in the crowd all intent each on his own interests, or when in a crowd talking about some attitude toward life, no one sees what you mean, then comes real loneliness. You can feel more alone in Grand Central Station at six o'clock than in an empty cathedral at the hour of noon.

Listen to the voice of God, "Wherefore do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your *soul* delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear and come unto Me. Hear, and your soul shall live."

THE DISTANCE TO GOD

Then comes the passionate plea: "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found. Call ye upon Him while He is near."

—And nobody heard. As if He were a ghost, men looked through Him, walked by Him—The Voice of God.

It is not opposition that hurts God. How can He expect us with our limited knowledge of the world to understand Him? But it is our looking through the world and seeing nothing of God that makes Him lonely, seeing only self and forms of self. And God is there, but we do not speak His language nor hear His voice. Men go on their way and do not know themselves to be sons of God. That is hard. That makes life seem useless.

As Christ must have felt at times—only more so—because they crucified Christ. They do not even bother to think harshly about God today. Studdert-Kennedy catches that feeling so poignantly in his poem, "Indifference."

"When Jesus came to Golgotha they hanged
Him on a tree,
They drove great nails through hands and feet,
and made a Calvary;
They crowned Him with a crown of thorns,
red were his wounds and deep,

THE DISTANCE TO GOD

For those were crude and cruel days, and
human flesh was cheap.

"When Jesus came to Birmingham they simply
passed Him by,
They never hurt a hair of Him, they only let
Him die;
For men had grown more tender, and they
would not give Him pain;
They only just passed down the street, and
left Him in the rain.

"Still Jesus cried, 'Forgive them, for they know
not what they do!'
And still it rained the winter rain that drenched
Him through and through.
The crowds went home and left the street
without a soul to see,
And Jesus crouched against a wall, and cried
for Calvary."

We are blind and deaf to God.

We do not want to say very much about this.
We just want to catch that illusive impression.
Change the old complaint, "Why doesn't God
speak to us?" to a bit of sympathetic wonder
about the way God tries to speak to us, and we
will not listen.

And because we are blind and deaf we are

THE DISTANCE TO GOD

impatient with God. We expect to have Him speak to us in language easy to understand.

He spoke to Moses in a burning bush; well, we will do His will too when He speaks to us in that way.

He spoke to Paul in a blinding vision; well, let Him send a vision to me and I will do His will.

Ah, but He does not always speak to men in that way, in signs. He spoke to Wesley through no burning bushes nor blinding visions. He spoke through the dull, insensate crowd who needed God and knew it not. He spoke to Francis through the tumbled-down stones of a ruined church. He spoke to Gandhi through the misery of a people.

We listen for a voice speaking English, and telling us specifically what to do; for a miraculous sign bringing us conviction. But the voice of God speaks not English, or French, or German, not even Greek or Hebrew, though it speaks through all of them. The voice of God is in human need and spiritual understanding. And hearing His voice means seeing these things. Every common bush may flame with a call of God, but we have no eyes to see, nor do our feet apprehend the Holy Ground. We look for a sign, for a finger writing on the wall, for the rolling, thunderous voice from the mountain

THE DISTANCE TO GOD

peak of some modern Sinai, for a dove descending out of heaven and a voice saying, "Do this; do that."

We leave it up to God—and God is lonely because we do not listen. We talk to God. Oh, how we talk! We chatter like tired children. We ask for this and that. We do not listen. There are so few aching silences in our prayers. We care so little. The world is restless, unhappy. We seek *our* rights, and it blinds us to the rights of others.

I hear a voice speaking out of tears. It is the voice of Jesus. He talked one day with the chief people of his time and their hearts were hard and they did not understand. And He went out and looked down on the city with its selfish, hungry crowds, and He wept as He said, "If thou hadst known, even thou in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace; but now are they hid from thine eyes."

If only our lives were pure enough, and open enough, and silent enough, that God could be evident to us and through us become articulate. There is an illumination, a sense of radiance which always distinguishes those who see. The light is not always the same, but it is always a light. With their going up and down on the face of the earth there goes a radiance.

We shall not get that radiance by adopting the

THE DISTANCE TO GOD

words or living the deeds of those who have gone before. Life is new and different always. But the central radiance is necessary.

Through all the ages God hath spoken unto men through the prophets: He spoke through their illumined souls. He speaks today to us, calling for the God-illumined. In bush, and smoke and fiery pillars; with thunder, and with still, small voice; in quiet church and noisy marts of trade, He spoke to men and still speaks. On street; in office and factories; in homes, the lonely God has spoken to men—and some have heard His voice and have been afraid.

And God is lonely still, longing for His children to care enough and to be strong enough to face the light and let, through them into the world, the illumination of the Way of Life to come. Because after all men do not understand language. They only understand life; and that sometimes only dimly. That is why we must try to find His Way of Life that light may come into our darkness, and the lonely God may find another one to whom He may speak.

THE NEW EARTH

THIS is one of the great controversies God has with man that he does not believe in the New Earth. He says he does with his lips but with his life—"that's something else again." But before we go into that let us make our connection.

All through this book we have been trying to take a God's-eye view of the world. It is not enough to see ourselves as others see us; we must be seen as we are. We are trying to think how we must look to a Being Whose thoughts are higher than our thoughts. Whose ways are higher than our ways.

It is not a question of condemnation of ourselves on the one hand, or rationalization of our compromises with the ideal on the other. It is a high kind of realism we are feeling. Here is what the realist says to his fellowmen: "It doesn't make any difference what you say. . . . You can talk about the idea of man all you like. . . . But here is what you are. How can you talk about believing in that ideal when this is what man is? Be realistic."

From the point of view of God, however, realism will take this form. "I do not care what man

THE NEW EARTH

has been. This is what you profess to believe. This, you claim, is the ultimate reality. This is what you say he is. This is what he has power to become. (Don't you like that expression of those who followed the light of Christ?) How can you be content then with what you have done, with failures and compromises? To them that received the revelation of the Eternal came the power to become the Sons of God. This is what you are," says God's realistic view of the world.

To this belief you cling, not because you want to merely. It is not just wishful thinking. You would so often that you did not believe it. You are tortured by the feeling that life has meaning. You would, at times, give almost anything to believe that you are—to take Galsworthy's picture—"flogging dead horses on a journey to the moon."

It would be wonderful if you did believe that life's meaning was a merry-go-round and you could get off or on as you liked, and it did not make any difference whether you sat on a bench and watched the others ride, or whether you mounted one of the papier-mâché horses in a pretense that you were going somewhere. If life has no sense and it is all just going around a circle everything would be easy. How wonder-

THE NEW EARTH

ful to believe that such ideas were the truth of reality.

You would not have to face man's long road. If that were the meaning of life—really its meaning—how restful it would be. But it isn't. That is an unreal world of evasion, of wishful thinking in which you refuse to face the facts. You believe in man, who has the divine spark in him; man who has a meaning and a goal. "How long," says God, "will you hide in this unreal world of appearance? When will you realize that the only peace possible for man is to face the reality of what he is?" "Now are ye all the Sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what ye shall be."

We do not mean, of course, that everybody believes that. You will find many outside, and inside, the church who will deny this thesis. But here you are, sufficiently interested in the way of Christ and His revelation of God to have read this far in your searching.

To you, haunted by the conviction that life does have meaning, the God of Christ speaks today. He speaks through the voice of the writer of the Book of Revelation, saying, "I would you were hot or cold. You have a great name. You say all the words but there is nothing you have done that is perfect [completed] in My sight."

THE NEW EARTH

He spoke in Jeremiah's words: "You have healed the hurt of My people slightly, crying, peace, peace, when there is no peace." And through Isaiah's vision: "Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I shall do a new thing. Now it shall spring forth. Shall ye not know it? I shall even make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." He lifts up His voice once more through the writer of Revelation: "I saw a new heaven and a New Earth."

God's great controversy with man is that man does not believe in a New Earth. If we are not to continue wasting our substance in commonplace living we must find what it is that stands in the way.

The first part of man's failure to achieve the New Earth is that *he does not believe it is necessary*. This is a very blind and immature stage in man's development but unfortunately many people are in it, some by ignorance, and many more by conscious desire. It is curious how many people you will find, who do not know how far short we are from what Jesus called the Kingdom of God; who do not realize that when that state of being occurs, which we pray about so much, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven," that it will be a New Earth, new in the sense of different.

THE NEW EARTH

The former things will have passed away. Let us take some of the expressions of that difference.

Symbolic first. The New Earth will be different from this earth we have, in that it will seem as natural for lions and calves to lie down together, and wolves to be watch-dogs for sheep, as it would seem strange, impossible, now.

In trying to work out for our city life the meaning behind Isaiah's powerful imagery, there came to mind the question of color. Isaiah was talking about the kind of world which was to be when men understood and followed the idea of God. He made a dramatic contrast. He said in effect that the world which was to be would be as different from that which now is as the world of animals would be if lions and calves were playmates, and wolves the shepherds of sheep. Obviously that kind of world is not in the practical nature of beasts as we have seen it. Just so far are we from the perfect world of man which is to be. It is an expression similar to the one "as the heavens are high above the earth." Then came the illustration which translates Isaiah's vision to the city streets. We have come, many of us, through a phase of prejudice on the color of a man's skin. We have arrived at the place where we take a man for what he is. We have even balanced our emotions so that we do no longer swing over to a sentimentalism

THE NEW EARTH

about color which is in reality a discrimination wherein we treat a man differently, though kindly, just because he is black. But we still know the color of his skin.

Now! The time is going to come when a black man and a white man will walk down the street side by side and neither be even conscious of the other's color.

Give the idea concretion. I might come to speak in your town. Afterwards some friend who was not there might ask you, "By the way, was that speaker you are talking about white or colored?" And you would answer, "Why, I didn't notice. I'll ask Dr. Blank of First Church when I see him. He has known him for years."

But when you asked Dr. Blank he would reply, "Black, I think—now that you ask me. No, he isn't either, he is white, of course. Oh, I don't know. I've known him for years and, come to think of it, I couldn't tell to save my life."

Am I right in thinking that if I were to speak in your Club meeting and I *were* black, you would, most of you, be immediately conscious of it, even though you treated me with perfect courtesy? Why should I, a white man, be free from the unconscious prejudice that a black man is under in a white and professedly Christian civilization?

Isaiah was talking, as I am, about a world so

THE NEW EARTH

different from what we have that it would have to be called a New Earth.

Again, take the vision of Revelation, "there shall be no night there." Night symbolizes, in its simplest form, rest, restoration of strength, respite from toil. For that, in the ideal world, there would be no need.

Night symbolizes in its complex forms, "terror by night." "My soul longeth more than they that watch for the morning." The sleepless nights come to mind when one is troubled by misunderstanding and mistakes, or the knowledge of treachery;—either without, where man's mutterings presage betrayal; or within, as one struggles with the burden of one's knowledge and one's purpose, and questioned by "hope made weak and sick with long delay," we are sick for the New Earth's coming. "There shall be no night there" means in this sense, that in the New Earth we shall know, terror departs and fears fade. We shall, in that time, walk in the light always. So much for symbols.

Expressed as a general ideal by the vision, "they shall not hurt nor destroy in all God's Holy Mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea"; or "nothing shall enter in that defileth or maketh a lie."

Made vivid in certain aspects by the contrast-

THE NEW EARTH

ing facts that there is hunger for food, and men's backs are bent by excessive toil, and their minds crack under the pressure of the earth we have; while all the time there is plenty, power, and peace within our control. Here is starvation in the midst of plenty, weariness in spite of power, knowledge leading on into a labyrinth instead of leading us out.

There are men, untroubled by this contrast between the fact and the idea, who complacently assert that this is the best of all possible worlds: They do not hunger after the New Earth because they are "too blind to have desire to see," and do not know that we need it.

Do *you* know that we need a New Earth? Or are you like the sophomore I ran up against the other day who said: "Why are you men always talking about problems? What problems? I'm not conscious of any problems." . . . "Oh, you mean war, and color, and work. We've always had them. Like the poor they are always with us. . . . As for motives and meanings we might as well face the fact that man's only motive is the desire for possession and the love of self; and the only control worth anything is an intelligent self-interest to keep him from abusing the right of his fellowmen. . . . You say the world needs changing, but I don't see what we need to

THE NEW EARTH

change or could change even if we wanted to do it."

There are many of you who have sympathy with his impatience with our impatience. "Why don't you leave things as they are?" is the querulous complaint of those who do not believe that a New Earth is necessary.

There are also those who *do not believe that a New Earth is possible.*

We come now to a second attitude in man with which God makes his protest. In taking them up in this order, we should not think that the three types of opposition to the demand for a New Earth grow out of each other. They are often quite separate. You may find those who do not believe a New Earth is necessary *because* they believe it is impossible; but ordinarily this first type hasn't even thought it necessary to consider whether it is possible.

I am not talking now of changing human nature. That human nature taken in the popular sense can be changed or, taken in the more exact sense, can be directed to good ends, is a part of the living faith of all builders of the Kingdom on earth. When we fall back on the old proverb, "You cannot change human nature," it is a weak excuse for our neglect.

Here is an engineer using all the week the power of steam which by its nature expands in

THE NEW EARTH

all directions; which by its nature, uncontrolled or partly controlled, is destructive; yet he harnesses that power to move men and goods in the direction he wants them to go; to construct, not to destroy. But when you talk to him about the things of the spirit he deplores the sad fact, the unfortunate fact, that you cannot change human nature.

The farmer works with soil nature. The nature of the soil is to grow weeds faster than it does vegetables. The nature of the soil is to become sterile, to grow tired after it has produced good things for a while. But the farmer puts time, and energy, and equipment into the changing of soil nature. He piles hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of fertilizer upon his soil nature in the faith that good things will grow. But the farmer will look politely skeptical if you talk to him about belief in man contrary to his experience with human nature. His looks say: "In heaven, perhaps, but not in this world."

The believer in the New Earth must have it as a part of his faith that weeds do not grow faster in the human heart than they do in the soil; that human nature is not more desirous of spreading in all directions than is the power of steam. If men will only put some energy, some time, some money, some faith, into human nature

THE NEW EARTH

(call it changing it or directing it as you like), if they will only work at the great wasting fields of society with all its weeds, with all its waste power, as an engineer sets out to reclaim a waste desert, the New Earth will come.

Men do not go out on a thousand acre farm with a broken-handled hoe and expect to make produce grow. They buy a motor tractor and invest a great deal of money. And men cannot put a few cents a week and a pious wish into the machinery for the spiritual cultivation of a whole city full of human nature and expect good people to grow. All this we need to say. Nevertheless, this is not the main point which hinders those who do not believe a New Earth possible.

They do not believe the nature of man has the possibilities of a perfect life. The feelings of men may be responsive to the urge of the New Earth; but the attainment of the ideal is not possible. Man may hunger and thirst after righteousness; but he is never filled. He searches for the knowledge of God as a man searches for silver and gold, digging for it as for hid treasure; but he can never find the way to the city of God at the other end of the road. This is many a man's settled conviction and as long as it remains at the heart of a man in his reaction to the world, it is an impossible obstacle to the coming of the New Earth through him.

THE NEW EARTH

Man does not believe the New Earth is possible because he has a false conception of the nature of man, and a false faith, or lack of faith, in the possibility of directing men's motivating drives, his primal urges, as the psychologist calls it, to the attaining of high spiritual goals. The New Earth has historically been put off to another life primarily because man has no faith in the nature of man on this earth.

There is a beautiful picture taken in its idea from that which Fleg, the French poet, draws in that interesting novel, *The Life of Moses*. Moses is asking God why he cannot go on into the Promised Land. The picture is enlarged a bit here.

Moses asks God what this sin is which is too great to allow him to go. God answers.

"Moses, thou hast doubted me—but I forgave thee. How can man's finiteness expect to understand the Infinite?"

"Thou hast doubted thyself—but I forgave thee that. Knowing your own flesh and feeling the pressure of the spirit against its limitations how could you, a man, help but feel sometimes the terror of time?"

"But, Moses, thou hast doubted Israel, thou hast doubted mankind—his nature, the structure of his being;—and it is for that thou canst not enter into the land of my promise."

RY

LY

s

il

y

k

THE NEW EARTH

God did not say, "I shall not permit you to go because I do not wish it." The inference was clear: In the nature of the New Earth those who do not believe in the surety of its idea cannot—they cannot—enter in.

These first two obstacles in the way of the New Earth are matters of insight, man's failure in understanding, or at least to have confidence in, the idea. The final obstacle to the attaining of the New Earth is a question of the will.

There are those who see its necessity. They believe it will some day be possible, that it will in fact come to be. But they are *not willing to pay the price of it now*.

We must be honest about that. A part of the reason is that we do not quite know what the price is. And we are naturally hesitant about putting our hand to the plow lest we find ourselves, against our desires, looking back.

Do you know the Negro spiritual, "You can't plow a straight furrow if you keep a-lookin' back"? What instinctive insight there is in many of the Negro spirituals! "You can't plow a straight furrow if you keep looking back." It reminds you of "Truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they went out, they might have had the opportunity to have returned." You know we might almost add, "If they have their minds on that country, they

THE NEW EARTH

might as well return." People who are looking back to the past are of no value for the New Earth.

"Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert."

Realizing as we do that we must "ever march breast-forward, never dreaming wrong will conquer"; and seeing plainly as we do how obstructing is an attitude of timid clutching onto the past, still, we do have sympathy with the man today who is troubled about the New Earth and feels he has to know, before going forward, what the price is. He is inspired by the Biblical text, "What man of you starting to build a house, doth not first sit down and count the cost?"

What is the price of the New Earth?

It would be an easy way out merely to quote the principle Jesus gives to us; a principle dramatically stated in the *Servant in the House* where Manson answers the Bishop's question about how much the new church will cost. "All that you have," Manson said quietly. "All that you have." Thus Jesus said to us, leave everything, if need be: father and mother, friends, home, loved ones who are dead, business, self, success—everything, if need be.

THE NEW EARTH

The principle is too broad. We need some of the details sketched in. Two of them need emphasis. Both are matters of attitude.

They are essential achievements of the spirit, if the New Earth is to come. Neither of them are possible changes by the free choice of privileged people, the cynics say. If, however, these steps toward the perfect cannot be taken by people free to make the choice, then revolution will be the inevitable next step. But revolution would merely turn over the hour glass which marks the futility of life.

The first part of the price is the acceptance of the fact of change. Isn't it queer, when you think about it, that so many of us have been talking about the Kingdom of God with our lips, but have not considered that it is not going to come without taking from us many things we now value. We like to think of ourselves as workmen in the building of God's world, but we forget in our enthusiasm a necessary part of that job.

"I shall give to thee man's work [the poet says]
So fitted to thy growth,
That in God's Kingdom building, thou shalt use
Thy largest powers. Only this shall cost thee
Both thyself and things which, dear to thee,
Thou'lt lose."

THE NEW EARTH

How can we have justice for all, opportunity for all, beauty for all, security for all; without effecting the ease, and comfort, and power, and privilege of some? A New Earth will not come unless the price of acceptance of drastic change in things as they are, is made.

I said, "acceptance." Not through compulsion by fear, which is a grudging thing; not revolution of the under privileged to become top in the dog fight of life for a while. Acceptance. It is a glad, free, joyous acceptance, in your spirit and attitude, of a fact moving you, as soon as you can see the way, to come to the place where you can feel this: There is nothing I withhold, nothing which is now within my control (possessions, success, self—nothing) that I put before the vision that the New Earth shall come.

Ask yourself whether this is a part of your spirit? Do not confuse it by argument with yourself about not seeing what will happen next. Just ask yourself as a first step—"Is my own spirit clean? Are there any things I have I would not willingly give up for the New Earth?" It is an essential first step to know whether life for you is moving ever more surely in that direction.

The second part of the price grows out of the first. The removal of the *motive of possession* is a primary—in the sense of fundamental—item in the price of the New Earth. "This," men

THE NEW EARTH

say, "can never be done. Man is essentially a selfish animal."

Are you?

That is what God asks, "Are you?"

Humbly facing the question, so many times you say to your own conscience, "I'm afraid so."

Then a still, small voice says, "I don't believe you. You are not basically selfish. You would give up your life for your friend. There are many things for which you would die, many for which you would live and suffer. No, you are not a selfish animal."

You have been touched by the vision of man as the son of God. You have seen a picture of the New Earth. The price of it is to see its necessity, to believe in its possibility, to take each step as it comes without fear of change, confident that the wilderness and the solitary places shall see the glory of the perfect. It will not come unless we change. It is only when we stop wasting our substance in commonplace living that we shall see, at last, the New Earth.

IT IS NOT ENOUGH

WE return to the first theme for our final word. We hope it does not mean that we have been going around in circles. Rather it should mean that we can see with clearer understanding the reason for this plea, that we who claim to be the children of God shall evidence it in the transformation of life. There is the assumption in this chapter that the reader is familiar with Jesus' parable of the talents.

Most of us have a sneaking sympathy for the man with the one talent. He was afraid of even that little power that had been given to him. He carefully preserved and returned intact the responsibility which was his, breathing a sigh of relief as he handed it over: "There it is, all safe and whole, just as I received it." The Master said, "It is not enough."

It has never been enough to hold our own. The world has puttered along with a sort of trench warfare existence.

Exultingly the church proclaims, "We have increased in the number of our members by a fraction of a per cent above the increase in percentage in population. Isn't that wonderful!"

IT IS NOT ENOUGH

The church is holding its own with the natural growth of population."

"Now it is accounted a great matter if a man can retain but some part of his first zeal," says Thomas à Kempis sadly in commenting on this contentment man has in not slipping too rapidly.

"But isn't it better than nothing?" This comment has already been made upon the emphasis on prayer in which I tore down, or tried to, many of the old habits of prayer. "What you point out ahead as a goal may be very fine for those who can reach it, but for the rank and file of men who will not try the heights, is not this which you call a low end better than nothing? It at least keeps a man from worse things when he says prayers, even if they don't transform life."

Let us consider once more that which is our main theme. Regardless of which side you lean to, your tendency may be optimistic or you may be a little cynical on progress, but in either case you recognize that that state of society where the principle of Jesus operates—that we are the Family of God—is not coming very rapidly. It is a fair statement to make that in our modern world the brotherhood of men is more and more in men's desire, and less and less in their ability adequately to put it into practice. It does not worry some of you that you are in the state of a

IT IS NOT ENOUGH

draw—able to move back and forth across your corner of the board; unable to win, but impossible for you to be beaten. This attitude of the one-talent man has been, in many stages of man's history, man's constant concern and his apparent satisfaction.

Like the old game of "Button, button, who's got the button?" or the game, "Up Jenkins," we get rid of the talent of power as soon as we can, breathing a sigh of relief when our responsibility is over. But it makes an inane world. How futile this attitude makes life is shown by this experience.

In preparation for Lent one year I did what may seem a queer thing. It was not to a quiet place of retreat out into the hills or to an upper room that my feet carried me. It was not to the passionate beauty of mystical poetry, to *The Imitation*, or to the Bible that my mind turned. All these were the dwelling place of my spirit already.

It was not to an old cathedral that my footsteps carried me. No wise man sitting among high thoughts in a place apart was my goal. It was not to be alone with nature seeking the silence of infinities.

I sought the crowd.

As preparation for Lent I went to the Six-Day Bicycle Race in Madison Square Garden.

IT IS NOT ENOUGH

Queer? Why? I assure you it was spiritually stimulating. I went deliberately with as open a mind as a presumably sane person can have about such insanity. It was not to make comparisons although comparisons became inevitable. I went to see what drew twelve thousand people together on an afternoon.

There, within a wooden bowl with its steeply banked sides, a group of men were riding around on bicycles.

On Sunday night at nine o'clock just as I pronounced the benediction on our service of worship, a popular comedian shot off a gun. From that time on those riders went around that track. When I saw them they had been a thousand miles without getting out of a circumference of an eighth of a mile. Silly! Ridiculous! Yes. But how far have we gone in the same time?

For an hour I sat there until the circling forms became personalities. Strange, what it does to you. A certain portion of a man's nature cannot get away from an event which is personal. There are some things one always sees—men hanging on a barbed wire; working on a continuous belt in a factory; riding on a circular track; shuffling in a prison line; faces standing out in a congregation evidencing that the weary round of life is getting too much for them. I can see those men now as they are doing the same thing

IT IS NOT ENOUGH

over again in Chicago the next week, then on to Canada.

Back to a service which began the nineteen-hundredth anniversary observance of the Passion of Christ I went to ask them the question, "In what consists the difference between a Six-Day Bicycle Race and the Church?" The question is not asked in pessimism, not answered in hopelessness. But must we not admit that a part of the reason why we do not appeal to the twelve thousand is because of something wrong with us as well as our complacent idea that there is something wrong with them? Not seeing the goal with sufficient clarity or not having vital enough faith in it, we have so often made the church the pretense of motion like a Six-Day Bicycle Race.

Listen in on graduation speeches as an example.

"Ah, young men," says the successful big business man as he returns to his Alma Mater and with a touch of a sob in his voice comes to his peroration, "with your youth, with your enthusiasm, with the new power which we have in this old world, I can see before me, when I am gone, the new world of the future built by your devotion." But you just try and do it while he is still alive!

Philip Doddridge, the hymn writer and preacher of Wesley's time, saw the same things

IT IS NOT ENOUGH

Wesley saw. He knew that there must be a revival of spiritual power in England. He prayed that God would raise up a man to stir England from her lethargy. But he also prayed that the revival might not come until after his own tranquil course had run.

God never has said to man in any stage of history, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, you took a world which was full of problems, but which had great power for transforming the potential into the practical, and, while you have handed the world on with the same old problems involved, you have held the old world together anyway. Well done."

No! God has said, "Wicked and unprofitable generation! It is not enough to hold safe what has been given you of power."

But even if it had been enough in the olden days, it is no longer enough. If you do not know what kind of a power age we are living in it would be hopeless to introduce, in a paragraph or two, such a tremendous subject as the new world in which we are now. Another book could hardly contain my thoughts on this which is brought in now only as a note in the main theme. But to strike the note is needed, and the quickest way to do it is by telling of an experience which sets off in dramatic contrast the old world and the new.

IT IS NOT ENOUGH

In a hall improvised by curtains in a department store I sat one day waiting for a demonstration of Eric Robot, the mechanical man. The light was dim but there on the platform you could see him, a fantastic figure looking like a knight in medieval armor, great jointed body, huge helmeted head, grim and silent.

After a few moments some lights went on and a man stepped out on the platform to tell us that this was the mechanical man which, or who, was a demonstration of the known power of machinery to operate in response to the human voice. The figure was not supernatural, there were no tricks involved; he, or it, had opened the engineers' convention in London and was examined by them. This was a visualization of the ability of man to use machinery for his aid.

The man went on to explain that Eric would obey his voice and would answer questions. When he does not know the answer he will say, "I don't know," which, as I pointed out afterward, was one way I was sure he was not a man. A man will always try to answer you even if he does not know the answer. The point the man wanted us to realize was that here was a machine containing miles of wire enclosed in steel which would obey the human voice providing the answer was already set up in the machine.

Then he began: "Eric Robot, wake up." And

IT IS NOT ENOUGH

in the holes in the visor two lights flashed on.

"Are you awake?" The figure nodded his head.

"Then show your teeth." And in the slit which formed a mouth a blue flame hissed.

"Good, you are awake. Stand up." And with a ponderous creaking motion the figure rose slowly to his (we'll have to call it one or the other) feet.

Then the man turned to us. "I am not running these questions in a series," he said. "You tell me what you want him to do; what questions to ask him." And we did.

He made gestures on command; told his name; where he had come from and where he was going.

Finally the demonstrator said, "Is there any one here who would like to run Eric? He will obey any voice." Quickly I hurried to the stage. Too suddenly I stood beside him.

What would you say to miles and miles of wire and sheet steel? Occasionally I have been at a loss over what to say to thousands and thousands of cells of flesh and miles of ganglia grouped together in a stranger. But at least I knew that he or she was human. What sort of conversation could you carry on with an "it"?

Not knowing what to say, I started with a command the demonstrator had used. I said,

IT IS NOT ENOUGH

"Show me your teeth," and the figure turned and hissed at me almost making me jump out of my skin.

Well, I ran him; made him go through his gestures; asked him questions.

"What's your name?"

"Eric Robot."

"What do you eat?"

"Electricity."

"How do you like our weather?"

"O.K."

"Did the mayor give you the key of our city?"

"No," in the most disgusted tone.

"Whom do gentlemen prefer?"

"Blondes," and the demonstrator chuckled because he had anticipated the question.

"Why are the flags wrongly placed in back of the platform?"

"I don't know." I had him on that one.

"Will you salute the flag?"

Without a word that mailed fist jerked up in salute and down again.

I can assure you, my knees were trembling.

Back in the rear of the little hall, I suddenly noticed a workman. His jaw had dropped down until it looked like a permanent dislocation. He was stunned by the spectacle of this figure. Now, I knew—as he did not—what that figure

IT IS NOT ENOUGH

meant to the workman's life and turning to the figure I asked my final question.

"What is going to happen to the man in industry whom you displace?"

In a cold, flat voice the machine replied, "I don't know."

We must find out. That is our job as we look out upon this potentially great power age.

Eric is a dramatization of power. In the time of Greece, historians tell us, the glory that was Greece was made possible because there were two slaves to every free man. The enforced labor of the two kept the third in sufficient luxury to develop philosophy, and art, and religion. Today, engineers tell us that there is in the United States, in mechanical power alone, the equivalent of some hundreds of human slaves for every man, woman, and child. These are not flesh and blood slaves, but machine power slaves, and the power is growing by the day. (No exact number is put down because the number of last month is out of date in this.)

Through a long history the world struggled on, borne upon the backs of human beings, and power was limited. Suddenly, the world has expanded its power so that the results of it are almost limitless. Machines receive messages with no one there; read to the blind; control power; compute mathematical problems; fly

IT IS NOT ENOUGH

aeroplanes to desired spots on the surface of the earth. There is no need to pile Ossa on Pelion since already we are stunned by the giant which has tendencies toward a Frankenstein. On the level of earth, at least, nothing seems impossible. No rivers uncrossable or mountains impassable; no wilderness that cannot be a garden spot nor desert that cannot be made to blossom as the rose. Yet we realize that the possibilities we see have the seeds of destruction in them. As Icarus says to Phædra the daughter of Minos, King of Crete, about the King's misuse of the inventive powers of Dædalus, the captive genius:

"It is a force of the earth which the gods had kept for man to use in the fertile works of peace: it was to be multiplied into a thousand mysterious subject spirits ready for work, at a sign from mortals. But now, in the hands of thy father, Iron will carry war and death over the world to make greater his power."

We can see a world with power to destroy itself—or to make a New Earth.

In such a world it is not enough to hold one's own. It is not enough to pray our begging prayers of personal needs. It is not enough to glow with a sense of personal goodness and fellowship with God. If we are in touch with God, we must do God's will. We must build His city. We must live as His family. We

IT IS NOT ENOUGH

have no time to worry about the minor points of a physical and superficial morality—or have we? Whether historic words are chanted in a dignified manner by people joining the church—or have we? Are we to be content with the negativism of a trench warfare? The holding on to old familiar places, to the holy ground handed to us by our fathers? Or are we on the march?

War is out, isn't it? It is not enough to keep a balance of armaments. War is out. We must choose now as in the olden days we were not compelled to choose. Can you ever pray and fight again? The issue is joined. It is not both. It is one or the other.

Charles Badger Clark, Jr., contrasts that so powerfully in the poem he calls "My Father and I" as the son of the Civil War faces the issue of the World War:

"My father prayed as he drew a bead on the
graycoats,
Back in those blazing years when the house was
divided.
Bless his old heart! There never was truer or
kinder;
Yet he prayed, while hoping the ball from his
clumsy old musket
Might thud to the body of some hot-eyed
young Southerner

IT IS NOT ENOUGH

And tumble him limp in the mud of the Vicksburg trenches.

"That was my father, serving the Lord and his country,

Praying and shooting whole-heartedly,
Never a doubt.

And now what about

Me in my own day of battle?

Could I put my prayers behind a slim Springfield bullet?

Hardly, except to mutter: 'Jesus, we part here,
My country calls for my body, and takes my soul also.

Do you see those humans herded and driven
against me?

Turn away, Jesus, for I've got to kill them.

Why? Oh, well, it's the way of my fathers,
And such evils bring some vast, vague good to
my country.

I don't know why, but today my business is
killing,

And my gods must be luck and the devil till
this thing is over.

Leave me now, Lord. Your eye makes me
slack in my duty.'

My father could mix his prayers and his shooting,

And he was a rare true man in his generation.

IT IS NOT ENOUGH

Now, I'm fairly decent in mine, I reckon;
Yet if I should pray like him, I'd spoil it by
laughing.
What is the matter?"

This is an example and a symbol of the various areas of imperfection now troubling the spirit and compromising the action of men.

The issue is joined. Men and women. Sons and daughters of God. We have one talent. We may not, in the twinkling of an eye, remake the world.

But if Christianity has any meaning at all, it must make us become the children of God. It must make us able to transform the particular part of the world in which we move as the children of God.

We must not be content to pass on the talent we have been given, unimpaired. It is not enough to pray unless our prayers bring in some portion of the Kingdom of God.

A picture like the Last Judgment comes to mind. The eternal Christ hanging on the cross of man's apathy and man's indifference. You come to the foot of that cross with this one talent—this life you have. His searching eyes look down at you.

You present before Him your report. "I have lived in the world of men," you say, "and have

IT IS NOT ENOUGH

seen all manner of evil. Yet here before Thee I present myself, 'pure and unspotted from the world.' 'I have kept my life clean, my heart from stain.'"

And He will say, "Where did you live?" and you will tell Him.

"And when?"

"The first half of the twentieth century."

"What did you do?"

Then you will run back over the record. The church you supported; the committees on which you served; the offices you held; the services you attended; the prayers you said. "I was of some influence in my time, O Lord!" you will finish proudly.

And He will say, "The first half of the twentieth century? . . . And on the Earth? I see its pages splotched and torn. Across its paths march millions of men, dead. I hear the cry of hunger in the streets. I feel the fear which gripped the hearts of men. Ugliness and base passion blots out beauty and chokes peace. O wretched and unprofitable generation!"

"But look," you cry. "Here is that which you gave me, one life pure and unspotted from the world!"

Then will the Master of Life make answer, "It is not enough."



Prayers in the Tabernacle

PRAYERS in the Tabernacle has the sound of a sanctuary. Dim light, candles, arched distances, sonorous reverberations of familiar prayers, all that, the mind senses in these words.

We recall, however, the words of John on Patmos, "Behold the Tabernacle of God is with men" and the feeling of the city streets and the market place comes in.

These are prayers from the Tabernacle pulpit and meditations out of the church's magazine, *Tabernacle Tidings*. They are illustrative of the means by which, through public prayer, I have tried to make the passion of this book find its way into the heart of a fellowship.

It is in a mood of meditation that they were prepared and used as a guide to groups and individuals as they sought after God "if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us."

An Invocation

God, our Father, compelling Object of our love, expulsive Power of our narrow lives, dy-

Prayers in the Tabernacle

namic Impulse of our devotion to man's needs—may no busyness of body, no arrogance of mind, no complacency of spirit, keep us from feeling Thy Presence with us.

If any have bowed merely from convention, or turned toward Thee because of custom, may some compelling vision of life's meanings shatter their unconscious condescension.

We deal with the problem of the meaning and the way of man's life. Keep us from any glib conclusions. Haunt us by the vision of the ideal, that we may never be satisfied until Thy way is found and made a Highway through the criss-cross traffic of men's careless paths straight and sure to the City of God.

A Litany on the First Affirmation of the Apostles' Creed

God,

The Search of all generations of men,
Before Whom some have cowered in fear,
And upon Whom some have fawned for favor,
And Whom some have denied with cursing,
And Whom some have forgotten in their prosperity,

We, who are trying the great affirmation of
Jesus,

That the Ruler of the Universe is in fatherly
relationship with men,

Prayers in the Tabernacle

Pause for a moment at the beginning of a new period in our experience to say:

"I believe in God, the Father . . . Maker."

Now we are all the sons and daughters of God.

(A Pause)

Father, if we believe the word we use so glibly, we are conscious that all men are in brotherly relationship one with the other. We are divided by class distinctions, separated by the color of skins, herded by national boundaries, encircled in the narrow limits of our self-conceit. We know that we cannot in one moment of wistful wishing wipe out the built-up antagonisms of centuries. But we are a Church—the Church of God—a fellowship of people desirous of following Christ by witnessing to our faith in a loving God in the criss-cross confusion of a complex city. May we not forget:

"I believe in God, the Father . . . Maker."

By this shall all men know that we are his disciples, if we show love one to another.

(A Pause)

O God of unspeakable beauty, may such visions of Thy way come down upon us that we become touched with stillness in our hearts and

Prayers in the Tabernacle

in inner quietness and poised peace may there come Thy power through Jesus, the Christ, our brother.

AMEN.

(Lift your head and think a moment about what you have read as a guide to prayer, before reading on.)

A Cluster of Common Prayers

O God, all understanding, we rest a moment on the way and make our common prayer.

If there be any that have come here seeking guidance in trouble, may the path be revealed.

If there be any who come worn by the struggle to make ideals and life match, may they find here quiet conviction.

If there be any who have enclosed themselves in the assurance of their own goodness, may they find here some vision to shatter that barrier between themselves and Thee.

To all who are earnestly sorry for their shortcomings and their wanderings, in the sincerity of their search for Thy way, may there come a new joy in life.

To all who care about their world and what it might become, may there be here a channel through which their high desires may flow.

To all who are seeking a way to build something of the Highway of God, may there come

Prayers in the Tabernacle

the peace of a life ever amending itself, and ever coming to a fuller knowledge of the truth.

* * *

O Lord, our God, the help of those that turn unto Thee, the hope of those that look unto Thee, cleanse us from every thought displeasing to Thy goodness, that with a pure heart and a quiet mind, with perfect love and calm hope, we may venture, in this moment of meditation, confidently and fearlessly to pray unto Thee.

—*Adapted from Basil, Fourth Century.*

* * *

God of all wisdom, source of light, and meaning behind our world, keep us from an ignorance which makes us think we know all things. May we have the humble heart and quiet mind of truly wise men, who sense the unknowable in the midst of card-catalogued knowledge, and sense the unseen beyond the bounds of sight. May we be as courageous as true science and as honest as true religion. May we dare to live what we know and find in it the joy of living, that the sons of men shall be free and become Thy sons O God, through Christ.

* * *

O Lord, our God, may we see truth so clearly that we shall know the world's need of Thy spirit in our lives. Thus may we desire Thee with our whole heart; and so desiring may seek

Prayers in the Tabernacle

Thee; and seeking shall find; and finding may love Thee; and because we love may hate those things which hold back the coming, through us, of Thy Way of Life.

* * *

"Most Mighty God, Thou zealous Lover of all faithful souls,
Strengthen us with heavenly courage, lest the miserable flesh,
Not as yet fully subject to the spirit,
Prevail, and get the upper hand.
Preserve us from becoming too much entangled
In the cares of this life,
The necessities of the body, or the pleasures of the flesh,
Lest they prove to be an obstacle to the spirit
And hinder our free drawing near
To offer, on the altar of our own hearts,
Ourselves, even body and soul,
Faithfully committing all that is within our control
Unto Thee."

—Adapted from Thomas à Kempis.

Grace Before Bread

Almighty God, to Whom in common voice we so often pray, "give us this day our daily bread," may we for whom that phrase is but

Prayers in the Tabernacle

a thing we say, have constant knowledge of those for whom it is a desperate cry. Whenever we break bread ourselves, as we are now about to break it, may we not forget the brethren in adversity joined to us by the spirit of Him who taught us to say, "Our Father." Bless our lives in the sincerity of our search for a way to provide bread enough and to spare for all men that the anguish of the flesh may not obscure the Living Word.

Meditations On

Our Nearest Sin

Over-mastering sense of the spirit of right and truth—God—walk Thou amidst Thy people now. Cut from our lives the complacent feeling of our own goodness, shattering our unconscious condescension in deigning to bow before Thee; thrust from our hearts by the expulsive power of a new affection our old hates and fears and low desires. Close our eyes to the tinsel and draperies of life that in the darkness we may see—Thee. Shut our ears against the tumult of the world's manifold activities, that we may hear Thy voice.

In the secret place of my inner being, since no one knows I am reading these words, I drop

Prayers in the Tabernacle

all fears of what other people may think and ask myself, What more of God do I know this month than I did last?

May we be sensitive to wrong; and that most difficult of senses—our own wrong. May we have the courage to pick out one sin of our own:—pride, jealousy, quickness of temper, long holding of a grudge, desire for ease, love of luxury, stubbornness of opinion or way, cruelty in our thoughts about the motives of others—we cannot catalogue all sin. May we take one—our own nearest sin this moment, and holding it in our minds, resolve that we shall, during this month to come, keep its temptation ever before ourselves;—and may no laziness of spirit or selfishness of heart prevent us from putting that sin out of our lives.

Be still for a moment.

May we search for Thee; Oh, God; because if we search for Thee we shall find Thee; and finding Thee we cannot help but love Thee; and loving Thee we shall hate those things which hold back that which may come through us of Thy Kingdom.

Prayers in the Tabernacle

Loneliness

How lonely Thou must be sometimes, O God. We pay Thee reverence but we do not live Thy way nor think Thy thoughts. "As the heavens are high above the earth so are Thy ways higher than our ways and Thy thoughts than our thoughts." We know it is true. As often in a crowd a word is spoken, a story told, a laugh is given about some person or thing and we know it is useless to expect in that atmosphere of unconscious unkindliness that our thoughts of loving understanding will be understood, so it must be for Thee so often: longing for Thy children to come near enough so that Thou canst speak to them, and they will not.

O lonely God. Touch us by Thy high spirit. Give us clean thoughts, fill us so full of the sense of ourselves as Thy sons and daughters that we shall live it.

Faster and faster goes our world. We count its speeding evolutions. We measure the staggering distances and speed of the stars, we pile energy on energy. It does not go fast enough for us. We eliminate space—we hurl ourselves through lives that have no meaning. And suddenly in the midst of all our power and all our speed and all our rushing activity, we stop. We are alone— Where art Thou, God? Gone—no

Prayers in the Tabernacle

more we feel Thee. Gone! We try to prove Thee then. How funny we are. As if we could explain Thee like a chemical formula. It is as useless as to try to explain ourselves by chemical formulas. We are not proved, nor Thou.

Wide Horizons

O God, immortal and invisible—forgive the faltering faith of those who live among the mortal and the seen. We cannot help but sin. We say it not in excuse but facing the fact. When ugliness is spattering itself upon our world, we are not good if beauty is within our lives withheld. When men choose low things, we have sinned if our own choice was only on the level instead of high. When hate is such an easy way for decisions to be made, we doom the world to the dull gray mud of entrenched antagonisms, if we restrain the circle of our love. We are finite beings. Day by day we stand by burdened souls in whose tired ears thunder waters overwhelming—and we know it not. Forgive the unconsciousness of our contentment with the daily bread of our own needs. Enlarge the limits of our understanding of other men, O God. Put the infinite into our hearts.

Grant us Thy peace, O Lord. The peace of wide horizons. Spread Thy peace of the ever-enlarging circle of love upon our consciousness

Prayers in the Tabernacle

*until speechless, as when we part with a friend
or hold the silence of lonely visions too delicate
for words, we glimpse the joy that has no ending.*

The Sense of Limitation

Thou hast placed us within the bounds of time, and yet Thou hast also put eternity in our hearts. It is not easy to reconcile them. There are things we know. We say, because we know it is true, that selfishness makes a jangling world. We say, because we know it is true, that hate breeds bitterness. We see it happen. Yet, how can we be unselfish, for we must live; and as for love to everyone, it is too much to ask!

Selfishness is definite: it sets its bounds like time; it builds walls like hate; it is something we can handle in beginnings and endings. It is enclosed like a city defending itself from enemies; but it at least knows limits. Self-forgetfulness goes on—and on—and on—Love never faileth.

God, sometimes we almost wish we could not see. Sometimes we cannot stand the calls we hear. If only we were deaf and blind, and dull of heart so that we would not understand. We become so tired with the way our grasp expands beyond our easy living.

But then, O God, when it seems we cannot

Prayers in the Tabernacle

go on living toward the things we do believe, flooding from out of resources we cannot prove—we only know—comes power again, and we are glad that Thou hast set the world in our hearts, and that while we shall never be able to tell its beginning or its end, yet there are beauties unspeakable and man is ultimately good, we see, for love is his longing and Thou art his peace.

Wasting the Gift of God and The Miracle of Everyday

If only we would come unto ourselves. We have sinned and we do not know that we have sinned. We have taken the gift of God—this human life we hold, one life with the possibility in it of the divine—and we have kept it safe, rejoicing that it is clean, as men judge, pure and unspotted from the world.

That, in it, which has the possibility of infinite expansion, the spirit of man, we have kept, like a seed buried in the tomb of a Pharaoh, to be found safe and sound by explorers thousands of years afterwards.

We have given reasonableness to the scientist when he says there is nothing in man but this piece of flesh, since we have not made life sufficiently upsetting to his simple theories by add-

Prayers in the Tabernacle

ing to it facts he has to recognize, even though he cannot explain them.

We have sinned, O God! we have wasted Thy substance in commonplace living.

We have taken a world which has in it the possibilities of the family of God and we have not raised it above the jungle law very far. We are content to pray about a City of God, while we dwell in the City of Dreadful Night.

We have said the words of our Lord's Prayer as a piece of conventional ritual instead of as an expression of our high hopes and a constant recognition of how far we have fallen short of our ideals.

Touch us anew, O God! with the wonder and the glory of Christ. Turn our eyes back to incidents in time only that we may see eternal things again. Make sensitive our imaginations that we may know how crowded lives leave not a moment for a new knowledge of the divine-in-us to be born.

If any of us are passing through the years unconscious of the Miracle of the Everyday—that today, tomorrow, at any moment truth may open up to us the way, as light makes a path in the darkness—then haunt us by Thy Presence and establish in our hearts the yearning for the awful beauty of the Way of Christ.

Prayers in the Tabernacle

After Reading in the Psalms

We do thank Thee, O God, for the soul experience of man as it has come down to us in Thy Book. It satisfies the longings of our hearts. We hear the depth-cries from those men of old. We turn to it in trouble and find how men have lived in times past, have struggled, fallen, become frightened, and found help. It is not for special favor that we pray; not for protection against the physical evils which befall men. We do not selfishly glory in immunity for ourselves while thousands fall at our side and tens of thousands at our right hand. It is from the fears of the soul that we seek protection.

We do know that, if we trust in Thee, the snares of selfish pleasure, the noisome pestilence of evil and degrading thoughts, the killing shafts of bitterness, the destruction of soul burning in the noon-day of men's struggle for success shall not befall the spirit which we are, nor shall the plague of a twisted life come nigh the bodies in which we dwell. We shall walk triumphant, conquerors in Christ.

This our prayer, O God; this large thing we seek for:—to be able to face life unafraid. This is the world's greatest search. If Thou, Lord, shouldst mark our failings, there is no hope. But we do come to Thee in the confidence that, if

Prayers in the Tabernacle

our souls do honestly wait upon Thee, if we do really try to make our lives the testimony of our lips, we shall find Thee. May we, as we go on in the day-by-day-ness of living, find our lives making the little world with which we have contact become more and more a decent place, a more Christlike place, worthy of the sons and daughters of God. In the spirit of the Master Builder of lives, we make our prayer.

The Words We Use

Words, words, words. They roll sonorously from our lips. "In Thee do we put our trust." The sounding-board of a hollow world sends back a booming echo. It is like unto the foolishness of a passing comment repeated more loudly and then shouted to be heard by the ears of one who is deaf; and when we hear our own stentorian tones crying aloud, "Nice weather we are having," then we know how unimportant was our addition to the confusing sounds of the world.

Just so we find ourselves today with our accustomed words of pious trust listened to with a twisted smile. What do we mean? In whom, in what, do we put our trust?

"... My spirit was overwhelmed within me . . . I looked on my right hand and beheld

Prayers in the Tabernacle

but there was no man that would know me; refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.

"I cried unto thee, O Lord; I said, Thou art my refuge . . . in the land of the living.

"Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low; deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I.

"Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy name."

We recognize the validity of that cry. It wells out of the lives of many in these testing times. But where is the answer? In whom, in what, do we put our trust?

Down through the ages there comes a persistent note, picked up and sent on again with power as men find themselves forced back on fundamental things. The spirit of Jeremiah speaks again.

We have forsaken God and are chasing after gods. Our arrogance and our pride, our foolish sightless pride, in our civilization has brought an inevitable destruction. We shall go out into captivity, our city is in ruins. But fear not, O sons of men, the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

The eternal words are still true although we cannot take them upon our lips so easily. We must earn the right to say them again. Righteousness exalther a nation; brotherhood is the goal of society; love the conquering power.

Prayers in the Tabernacle

Face your world honestly. Recognize its false directions. Set yourself as an individual to foster righteousness and judgment. Be not afraid to tear down old structures, to dig foundations deep.

You will be called all manner of things. You may have to stand alone against the multitude. But fear not, O sons of men, "Call unto God and He will answer thee and will show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not."

Our Father and our God, we can pray now with our lips words that express the desires of our hearts. We are troubled by the apartness of our lives from Thee, the separation of the cities of men from the City of Our God. We have no easy solution for the problems we see. We often know not where to turn to make life express Thy love. But we do know that there is Thy truth in this universe. We set ourselves to know it. We strive so to center our lives upon it, rather than upon ourselves, that as we see, we shall dare to follow the light. Only then will the words of our lips, expressed in the positive action of our lives, be kept from blaspheming Thy Holy Name.

Prayers in the Tabernacle

A Prayer of Confession During Communion

Father, we have been thinking about our sins. The sin of muddy lives. We used the word *stupid* in our service of Corporate Communion; but maybe the word *muddy* is better. It symbolizes so much. We think of past weakness; and the fear that doth so easily beset us; and of how the channel of our lives was not seen by others because the shallows of our thought made turbid the stream of action. Then, those we would have borne onward safely to the ocean of Thy truth, ran foul of the mud banks, missed the deep, sure waters, snagged upon the stumps of fallen ideas.

We do not console ourselves with the fact that others have dusty windows through which they looked upon us and, because their eyes were dimmed thereby, missed the course they might have seen. We know it is true that some people cannot see truth.

But, Father, all understanding, we believe we have seen a light. In us is the assurance of Thy Way. Ours is the radiant faith that Christ's Way is truth and light and life to men. Somehow we have fallen short of our vision. We have not given adequate expression to Thy love, which we profess; not adequate enough at least to make men want to walk beside us.

Prayers in the Tabernacle

For the sin of muddy lives, forgive us. May this season of holy memories dig so deep the channel of our spirits that with the stillness of mighty waters we shall bear Thy Church nearer to the harbor of Thy truth.

Out of Unbelief to God

Help Thou Our Unbelief

"Lord, we believe, help Thou our unbelief."

We seek Thy way. We gain reality in our living. We are glad in the attainment of our faith.

Then comes the cruel falling away. Nothing seems right. Many are the troubles in the hearts of the people before Thee this day.

Physical pain for self or those we love. . . . They cry unto Thee—Why? O Health of our health, where art Thou?

Mental ills—questioning of those things in which we have put our trust. They cry unto Thee—How? Mind of all minds, where art Thou?

The spiritual incapacities. . . . We lose our power to hold on. Blackness is all around us in which there is no light. Light of lights, Power of all powers, God of Love, where art Thou? From the depths of our troubled hearts we cry—

Prayers in the Tabernacle

Take not Thy holy spirit from us. Restore unto us the joy of Thy salvation.

Faith Through Trust

The Friends of God— What joy to be worthy of that name! To work out Thy will in the world as partners in the great plan. To be trusted with responsibility, the ordering of our lives, the choosing of our ways, because we are Thy friends. O God, how uplifted we are in that thought sometimes!

Then the awful realization that we have been untrue. We have violated Thy trust. We have been unfaithful to Thy friendship. We have done those things we ought not to have done and we have not done those things we should have done.

Then comes Thy spirit upon us. "My son, not what thou hast done nor what thou art. But what thou choosest now to become." It gives us power, we rise, comforted, in new strength. We will try again, Thou Friend of Friends.

The Peace of God

As we go out to live Thy way, to make our faith show in our lives, to prove our friendship with Thee in the way we make a friendly world, there comes, at last, Thy peace which through

Prayers in the Tabernacle

us finds resting place in this world—a world sick with the need of Thy Health, and Mind, and Love.

Our spirits are not at peace. This is no world in which a decent man can rest contented. But we have hope in peace to come on earth as we learn the meaning of the Words We Use.

Benedictions

Keep in our hearts the expectancy of the strong and radiant knowledge of the things that belong unto Thy peace.

* * *

And now may a better understanding of the spirit of Christ, and the desire to walk His Way, and the help, and the power, and the love of God, be and abide with each one of us, this day and even for ever more.